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IN HER MAJESTY'S
KEEPING

HON. LEWIS BLYNFIELD.





IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.

The Story of a Hidden Life.

BY
THE HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,

AUTHOR OF
'LADY GRIZEL,' 'MY LORDS OF STROGUE,' ETC.

'Recompense Injury with Justice, and Kindness with Kindness.'
CONFUCIUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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IN HER MAJESTY'S KEEPING.

PART II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER II.

MR. SCARRAWEG'S SECOND GROWL.

BESSMATES, I have a hazy idea that I must have lost my temper, which is a pity, for you'll think that I'm a terrible bear, and that I'm not fit to manage a thousand or so of the crawling, grovelling curs, for whom your tender pity is aroused. But I'm glad to see Ebenezer has spoken up for me on the whole, though he does say I'm grumpy. Poor lad! he's not one of the curs, that's a mercy.

You must excuse my being cross, but this age of ours is by a vast deal too sentimental. You should go to sea and be knocked about in the fresh air ; for you are all nerves. Whether it's railways or strong tea, it is for doctors to determine. In my seafaring days (then we saw nothing nearer to a cur than a dogfish), my captain, when he was ashore, used to have great, handsome, mahogany chairs in his parlour, shiny with elbow-grease, with nice stuffed seats of black horsehair, that did you good when you sat down on 'em to drink his health. Now it's all the go to have little, curly, spidery things, that I respect myself too much to so much as try to sit upon ; for I'm a tub-built barque, and when I run aground it's a matter of no little hauling to get me off again. It's just the same with everything else. Thin, spidery, over-elegant. Your supersensitive imaginations run away with you, and you cry out and want things softened down that are too soft already. If the public were allowed to visit the prisoners, say two days a week (I can't see why they should not), they'd see for themselves how things stand, and that they're

exciting themselves without a cause. In the old days of the hulks convicts led awful lives, no doubt. Ill-fed, ill-clothed, the feeble subjected to the tyranny of the strong, the good and bad chained together in groups ; there is no doubt that it was a Pandemonium. If you could only listen, as I do every weary day, to the complaints men make who ask to see the governor ! Either they are trivial or they are saucy. It is not possible to find anything serious to complain of. The warders know this, and, being ignorant men, are frightened when the public make an outcry, for they can't make out what it's all about ; so they grow demoralised and fear to do their duty. Their lives are tormented by the convicts within ; their minds are disturbed by the mis-statements which ex-convicts send to the newspapers. In the vicinity of Millbank and Pentonville, if they go outside in uniform to enjoy a glass of ale, they are gibed at by street-arabs, who call them 'slave-drivers.' And why ? Simply because all is mystery within. It's like the Bluebeard chamber that I saw once in a pantomime. Awful without, but when the door opened there were

great masks grinning at you. I don't mean to say that street-arabs ought to be allowed to go inside (except on business), but if it was known that respectable parties might visit the prisons, the warders would take no heed of the street-arabs, because they would not feel in a false position, and the ex-convicts would be more careful what they wrote, for their falsehoods would be shown up at once. As it is, I'm sorry for the poor fellows under me. They feel poorly as I do, and, like me, have no joy in their profession. I've read somewhere, in a first-rate novel that's in our prison-library—I think it was called 'Lady Grizel'—about Bambridge and the Fleet in the days of George the Third. Well, that was a chamber of horrors and no mistake. Bambridge used to torture the poor things and sell them to the crimping parties, and kill some outright. He had bought a monopoly of the place and did what he liked, and no one bothered their heads about it. Now we're undergoing the reaction for all that. It's a sentimental, unreasoning folly that makes me wild. Are these men criminals or not? Is the system intended to

be deterrent, or to offer a premium for crime ? I vow (you're all so mawkish) that I'd like to set up the rack again and torment these plausible complaining villains till their joints cracked. I'd make 'em howl, I warrant, and they'd have something to complain of. Depend upon it, the more unworthy they are the more they'll yelp. It's the same as with the tramps on country roads, who make the green lanes dangerous for ladies. They won't do any work, not they ! But they'll howl and make complaints as much as you please. It's the steady, sensible, labouring men who dig the fields or do what work they can get, and keep out of strikes and arguments, and hold their tongues. In the same way it's the better class who do their labour in prison, and make no noise (I won't say that they're contrite or determined to be good later). But I'm getting hot again, so must give the tiller a touch and try another tack.

I see one of the complainants says (a fine complaint !) that warders as a rule are brutal in their manners. Well, Mr. Tilgoe's manners were beyond reproach, perhaps, but his heart wasn't. Warders are obliged to

speak sternly to their gangs; that's recognised; or they would not be obeyed. The majority of the unruly prison-class is made up of the refuse of the towns. Men who, beginning as gutter-snipes, have received more kicks than halfpence since they were in arms, and are well-broken to the former. If you spoke nicely to them they would not know what you meant, and would put their tongues out. Even their dear mothers, when they were washing their baby-faces—which they didn't often do—kept up an accompaniment of slaps, to use them to the ways of a hard world; while as to their fathers—those who ever knew any—they were always handy with blows when the urchins lingered on returning from the pawnshop. A man like Tilgoe would object to being spoken gruffly to, I have no doubt, and so might Ebenezer; but do you suppose Spevins would wince, or Soda? A very likely thing, indeed. And this brings me in my rambling way to the real grievance—a hole in our armour—a grievance which affects the silent, suffering ones—not men like Tilgoe, who ought not to be considered at all; I mean the classing of

prisoners in different lots, so as to divide the sheep from the goats. That this really is a grievance I admit ; but it is a very difficult one to remedy, because very few mortals are all black or all white, and complications arise which are puzzling. One set, as matters are arranged at present, are supposed to contaminate another. Very well, we'll agree that that is so ; but who is the contaminator ? not always the Bill Sykes, who's never known anything but crime. Bill Sykes can't possibly contaminate the Reverend Tilgoe, for instance, when they're thrown together, though out in the open street the parson would not demean himself by touching the costermonger with so much as a finger-tip. The Reverend Tilgoe might very probably lead others astray, but could scarcely be disimproved himself, for all his polished exterior. Therefore I think it's nice and unselfish of him to preach on classification in his book, and so try to sweep the less guilty out of his path, against the time when he will come back to us for another lagging.

Now when I reflect upon that poor fellow Ebenezer, I find that the thing of all others

which helped most to bowl him over, was the companionship into which he was thrown. Tilgoe is himself so extremely base a man that (though he preaches and raves about the wickedness of everybody except himself) he cannot comprehend the position of one like Ebenezer; hence in his chapters upon classification, that howler leaves untouched a most important point, namely, that the entire system weighs unduly in all its minute details upon men like Anderson. A gentleman, acting we will say under female influence, commits a forgery and finds himself among our lambs. Every second of every minute of every hour is a throb of agony to him until he is hardened or broken; one of the two contingencies is inevitable. His punishment therefore becomes at least twice as severe in its application as that of a bovine common fellow, who is cast for a much longer sentence. It may be argued that a judge in delivering sentence considers this point; but in practice it is not so. Herded as he is with the vilest scum on earth—the Tilgoes and the Sodas—he goes to inevitable ruin long before the end of, say five years, which is the briefest term of penal

servitude ever given. Let us see, then, if we can't devise something which would touch this very real sore.

Mind you I'm not talking nonsense, or wanting to suggest that gentlemen, because they are gentlemen, should have a cosy prison to themselves with Brussels carpets and books from Mudie's and ices from Gunter's. Not a bit of it. We will start with the idea that length of sentences should continue in the main pretty much as they are, with such slight modifications as may seem promising. Now, in the last part of Ebenezer's manuscript, you were told that a Royal Commission sat upon the prison question, and that a compromise was come to. During the last part of his time, you were informed, new regulations came into force, by which the Sunday talks were ordered to be stopped, and strict silence maintained at labour. But, Lord bless your dear eyes, you don't expect such a half-and-half measure as that to work, do you? If I see two chaps palaver-ing in whispers, do you think I'd always have the heart to report 'em? Not I! No more would junior warders, whether influenced by fivers or something better. It 'd be too like

that cup of somebody or other's that was always at his lips, and yet he couldn't drink, which must have been annoying. Besides, there are dozens of ways for men to communicate which you can't possibly stop, try how you may. For the sake of humanity, let's admit at once that men's hearts are not of stone, and that even a chief-warder may lean sometimes to kindness. Moreover, as things are, it's foolish to imagine that the best-intentioned warder could maintain absolute silence amongst the men of a hard-labour party, unless the number under him were reduced to half a dozen. Say that his gang numbers fifteen or twenty, and that they are working at brick-making or in a quarry. They are not all tied together. Two are employed in one place, three in another a few yards to the right, and half a dozen a stone's throw to the left. In some cases his party is divided, one portion working outside a shed, the other inside. He cannot keep all his men in sight at once. Unless you have a warder to every five men or so, you won't prevent conversation, and those who tell you that the members of a labour-party are not

in deep confab during most of their working hours, are either deceiving themselves or making game of you. That's positive, as you'd know if you had been so long in the trade as I have.

And if prisoners were divided with care and grouped in classes, what would it matter if they talked? Two men of a better kind, as Ebenezer hints, would sigh over their fate and vow together 'never to do it any more' (whatever it was) when they came out. Thus they'd strengthen each other's good resolutions rather than not; whereas now (it's audible enough, even though it's said in whispers) an old scoundrel puts his finger on his nose and says with a wink, maybe in chapel, 'I'll show yer 'ow to enjoy life, my little cockawax, if ye've only the pluck to run a bit of risk, like the sodger does who gets the Victoria cross.'

That's where it is; but how are you going to divide 'em? Ebenezer had a plan of classing men by the amount of premeditation which their crime showed; but that wouldn't quite answer, I'm afraid: not but what I'd rather take a murderer for a servant any day, than

an old fence. Neither could you class men altogether by the position they've held in life, although that ought to be taken into consideration more than it is. Our rulers legislate as if people were consistent—if they were, how dull the world would be—yet nobody's consistent with himself, and convicts less than any. Even the cultivated are wofully perverse sometimes, possessed as it seems by devils. Some of 'em, and these the best-educated, develop a queer delight in degrading themselves; in plunging right down to the bottom all of a plump. I've known polished people to find pleasure in the foulest language and most filthy stories; and now I remember, years ago, when I first joined, that there was a balcony at Chatham which we called the 'gentleman's landing,' where three parsons and two bankers, and a few ex-cavalry officers were located. They had all moved in tip-top society, among dukes and duchesses; but do you suppose that they'd behave themselves? not they. There was constant uproar and row and blasphemy, and every sort of disgraceful sinfulness going on upon that landing. It was the worst spot in the whole

prison—a bear-garden and a scandal—and yet these were men whom you would have expected to set a good example. And it wasn't that they were contaminated by others, because they went at it the moment they came in. It was as though their self-respect had smashed-up all at once and, that having gone down a bit to start with, they found comfort in going as far as they could, plunging of their own free will, out of all reckoning, to the lowest abyss of all.

Therefore, you see, I'm not pleading for the gentlemen-lags because they are gentlemen and fond of Brussels carpets; and I don't want to class by book-learning in an order of precedence like the nobility. When classification is thoroughly gone into, I want the condition of the educated and sensitive-minded to be specially considered so far as their behaviour justifies it. In this lot, whom I call 'sensitive-minded,' I include not only parsons and officers and that, but clerks, the better class of shopmen, all in fact—to make the thing as broad as possible—who don't take the big jump just mentioned, and who, it being the first sentence, are really

anxious to be kept out of temptation for the future.

I've turned the matter over in my mind a good bit whilst hanging about the prison-yard attending to my duties, and this is what my cogitations came to. I'd classify new-comers by *their antecedents, and overhaul that by looking at the nature of the crime*, and I'd set a vigilant watch over their conduct while in prison. For instance, I'd say: B's. a gentleman by birth and so on, and his crime, forgery, committed in a moment of sudden temptation—is it? Very good. No. 1 class for him, and labour suited to his powers; and I'd hang a board in his cell which would be always before his eyes, whereon I'd write, 'So long as you are industrious and well-behaved you'll be treated with consideration. If you behave badly you'll be placed in bad company.' Then I'd say: C.'s a hot-tempered chap, of no education, and this is his first offence—is it? In a moment of exasperation he struck his old 'ooman with a knife. We all know that women are very trying—though it's not quite right to stick 'em with knives. First class

for him too. The gentleman can't expect to be thrown only among gentlemen ; but this ignorant fellow won't do him any harm, while the influence of the well-behaved, educated man can't but improve the ignorant one. Then I'd say : Reverend Aurelius Tilgoe, scamp of the first water, sneaking, crawling, calculating blackguard, who lays traps and waits like a vampire for his feast. His manners are beautiful, his education ditto, but his crime odious, and this his second sentence ; away with him ! Third class for the Reverend Aurelius, and bad grub and stiff work. He's a goat—a wolf in sheep's clothing. Put him with the 'old fences,' the Jaggses, the Sodas, the receivers of stolen goods, the men who are irreclaimable. They won't hurt him and he won't hurt them, and they'll have a pretty and entertaining little society all to themselves. Spevins, too, though he was only undergoing a first sentence, would find himself in a lower class, because he is an old sinner, though hitherto undetected, and from the peculiar nature of his opinions is beyond reformatory influence. And then I'd apportion labour

according to the class. Class I. should have lightish labour. That of Class II. should be more stiff; while Tilgoe and his lot would have real awful work to do, such as is done by the unfortunate men in the basins.

By-the-bye (this is a parenthesis) one complacent convict writer complains, *now that he is out*, that prison labour isn't hard enough, and that therefore 'the tax-payer' should see to it. Wouldn't I like to send that chap for a bit into the blue Thames mud, and break his back for him! I'd send him to Chatham to take his place among that thin, pale, gaunt, cadaverous contingent, and see whether the work there isn't sufficiently hard for any man born of woman! But where was I? I seem to be aground again. Oh! I remember, we were talking of classes. Well. Class I., being the best class, might be given extra advantages in the way of earning remission. Its members might, perhaps, being mostly men whose passions had run away with them whilst they were napping, be accorded also special means of shortening their sentences—say, in promising cases, by earning double marks. Each class would have to occupy a

separate prison, of course, which might be difficult of arrangement, because the new plan would require an extra prison or two, and prisons cost money, and tax-payers cry out, as Tilgoe knows right well. And yet here's an idea which strikes me all at once. The prisons of Portland and Chatham will become useless in three or four years at most, because the public works there will be finished, and convicts sentenced to hard labour must have stiff out-door work found for them somewhere else. Hence arises this brilliant idea of mine. First you build a new prison upon the spot selected for the new public works—this must be done in any case—and you employ the old prisons—it's a pity to dismantle them—for the incarceration of No. 1 class ; that is, of the men who would have light labour, such as shoemaking and tailoring, and so forth, instead of being sent out as they now are with the labourers and quarrymen. Plenty of suitable labour could be found for them there, independent of the stone-cutting and digging which, on a large scale, would have ceased. A great sail-loft might be erected, and the sails made for the

royal navy ; also the anchors and chains for the same service, which would provide fitting work for such of the ignorant men who were originally tillers of the soil, but whose antecedents have placed them in a better class than that whose business it is to work in the clay.

It appears necessary to limit the work of convicts to that required for government use in order to avoid rows, and yet this is a silly thing. Outside tradesmen have more than once complained that the public sale of the results of convict labour takes the bread out of the mouths of honest men. Nothing can be founded upon falser premises. A large proportion of convicts, be it remembered, were engaged in trades before they were locked up. Their work is withdrawn, therefore, from the market for the time being, and would only be returned half-fold ; for it is a recognised fact that, by reason of his position, a convict cannot be expected to do much more than half what is daily accomplished by a free man. But it isn't worth while arguing this point, for in the government service alone there is plenty of employment

to be found which Class I. might be set to do in a prison where what are called 'Public Works' have ceased to be. And it strikes me now, as I chat on and twist the thing over and over, that if the authorities prefer turning Portland prison into barracks, as I'm told they do, we could manage our first class in a different way. Chatham prison, at this present moment, is divided into sections, each of which is a separate establishment, just as the water-tight compartments of a ship are separate. Why not make a trial of classes in some such fashion? This latter plan would have the advantage over the other, that it could be put into force without delay, instead of waiting for the completion of the public works now in operation before trying the experiment.

Tilgoe and the other complainants have, I regret to tell you, gained the end partly for which they wrote their books. They have succeeded in worriting the prison officials from the top of the tree down to the root. They have even succeeded so well as to goad the advisers of her Gracious Majesty—God bless her!—who ought not to have demeaned

themselves by noticing such trash, to rake up the question once again, which before was tidied over by the compromise. There was another Royal Commission a few months since. My lords have been bustling all over the place, just as they did before, and driving about and eating lunches, and they haven't discovered anything which they didn't know already—that's odd, isn't it? But they do see, at least so I've just been informed, that the silent system, as at present worked, is all my eye and my elbow. They propose—so the report recently issued says—to classify prisoners for the future by first convictions; and I tell 'em now, if they don't think it over-bold in an honest tar as served his queen—God bless her!—and his country, to make suggestions, that they might just as well leave the matter as it was, for all the good their bustling has done. By this new plan they'll be putting Ebenezer and Spevins, the downy one, and men like Miffy and the poacher, whose only crime was that he couldn't be made to believe that rabbits weren't common property, all into one class. Another Spevins will be able to get round

another Ebenezer, just as, I'm sorry to say, the first one did ; and no doubt Miffy being weak and the poacher being stupid and easily awed by superior talent, will join in some other notable scheme for relieving lords and ladies of their plate-chests. That's not the way to do it—maybe ten years hence they'll find that out, and take another drive, and some more lunch, and get a step farther on. England's always been slow, but, like the elephant, her foot, if round, and large, and heavy, is said to be sure, which it's a comfort to believe. Next time they hold a Royal Commission they'll interview us warders, I hope, and add a little to our wages. We're a fine body of men, but not well used. There, there ! now I'm beginning to cry out, just like the Reverend Aurelius. Avast there—put about—let's keep off that rock.*

* Since the above was written an attempt has been made at Millbank to put into force the suggestion of the Royal Commission as to classification. First-sentence men are being drafted into two pentagons which chance to be vacant, and they will remain there in solitude until a public works prison can be found for them. But theoretically—I've not been a prisoner myself—I must say I

There's another thing they'll look into some day perhaps, and that's the prison-farce called 'School.' I'm one with all the complainants there—even with Tilgoe. I have before me the schedule for the state of education at our prison of Dartmoor within

agree with old Scarraweg. Grouping first-sentence men together must prove a farce, and defeat its own object, for the percentage of men under first sentence who have never really committed a previous crime is absurdly small. The experience of the police makes that as clear as noonday, so does that of the chaplains. Certain classes of crime are progressive. For example a man is taken and receives his first sentence for 'robbery with violence.' Ostensibly he has been seized by a sudden fury, and rushes out and garrots some one, although, up to the moment of this impulse, he has been a lambkin. The experience of the police shows clearly that *robbery with violence is very seldom a first crime*. The man has begun as a pickpocket, and becoming more reckless day by day, comes gradually to half-murdering a person to obtain his property, instead of, as at first, filching his goods when he wasn't looking. A certain prison official of great experience even declares that the percentage of 'first convictions' which are really 'first faults' is as low as five in a hundred. If this is the case, and the evidence of very many of the most experienced persons connected with prison discipline agrees on this point, then a classification of convicts by first convictions alone must be abortive and a mere waste of time.—*Note by Printer's Devil, Murch, 1880.*

eighteen months. Here it is, and it speaks for itself :

Prisoners	961
Previously convicted . . .	771
Never " . . .	190
	<hr/>
	961
1st sentence of Penal Servitude .	662
2nd " " " .	196
3rd " " " .	85
4th " " " .	18
	<hr/>
	961
EDUCATION—Good . . .	96
" Moderate . .	191
" Nil . . .	674 !

Look at that! Two-thirds of the men under our charge now are unable to read and write at all; and yet seven hundred and seventy-one out of their number have been in durance vile before (either in convict or county prisons), and all have been through the preliminary nine months of solitary confinement which are known as 'separates.' There are schoolmasters and assistants who buzz about, but the result of their labours this schedule clearly shows. Yet, dear me, it strikes me that perhaps my lords overlook this on purpose, as being disinclined to educate

the masses. Maybe they agree with what Spevins remarked about education doing more harm than good to natures already gangrened. Maybe they're of opinion that the over-education of the lower classes is already doing social harm enough without adding to the hubbub, which looms in the future, the leaven of a few thousand criminals. Lots of people are of that opinion, I know; and it isn't for the likes of me to say who is right. But if these are, then I say: 'Do away with it altogether, and give the money saved in salaries as extra pay to warders. One schoolmaster would be wanted in each prison to keep the library and write the letters of the illiterate, and that's all. Give the surplus to us janitors to make our lives more pleasant. But if they really do not object to prisoners learning something that may do 'em good—they need not be taught more than to write and read—why can't they amalgamate the educational arrangements in the preliminary, or close prisons? The schoolmaster at Chatham used to complain, as I remember, that it wasn't lively work trying to instil A B C of an evening into a stupid man worn out with toil.

Now there's no doubt that the digging out of those splendid basins there is fearful toil. Men stand on platforms, six-deep one above another, the lowest buried to the waist in filth, and there they shovel, shovel, shovel, throwing up foul stuff from one platform to another, with an upward movement which wrenches every muscle. Broken with fatigue—w weary in body and vacant in mind—it's not likely that of an evening they should think of anything but bed. Moreover they are not roused in any way to the advantage of improving themselves. Why not go at reading and writing, tooth and nail, during 'separates' at Pentonville and Millbank? They're set to pick oakum, or weave mats, or make shoes there, merely to employ their minds, and so prevent them from turning into idiots (because the real punishment of that stage is downright solitude—not work). Why not, then, make school the chief business for the first nine months of those that can't read or write? Much may be done in nine months, working day after day; and after that, when they are sent to public works, a little keeping up now and again will prevent

their forgetting what they've learnt. Do you know that in summer-time illiterate convicts are instructed in the mysteries of the three R's at the rate of half an hour a week? In my mind's eye (you see I'm growing quite literary and poetical—there's never any knowing what we may come to!) I behold education going on at Pentonville; the men located in particular halls and landings, not as at present, according as to whether they make mats or shoes or scratch oakum into shreds, but according to their educational proficiency. The cell-doors all open in a particular hall we'll say, each prisoner *alone* with book and slate within his own domain; the schoolmaster hovering like a seamew in the centre space, to be summoned by this or that prisoner, who may find himself in a fog, by touching the alarm, with which at other times he summons the warder placed in charge of him. The chaplain flutters here and there, or swoops. The head-schoolmaster gives an eye all round; the subs go in from cell to cell, unfurl the multiplication-table, holy-stone the slate, scrub up the decks, set the man to work, and encourage

him to overhaul his wits. The ignorant costermonger, who struck his old 'ooman in a fit of ungoverned temper, might grow hopeful, seeing something bright in front of him, instead of brooding over the old gal's delinquencies, and reflecting upon the best place to give her another "nasty one" when he comes out, while he mechanically weaves his mat. Upon my word, my eyes grow moist at the picture; but this won't do, you know. My lords must know better than an old battered bit of goods like me. They have their reasons for letting things slide, though what Spevins said about the School Board never reaching such gutter-snipes as he was, ought to make them turn this over between two goes of beef and pickles. Granted that incorrigibles should not be given new weapons wherewith to wound, surely the gutter-snipes whom the School Board cannot hope to reach do not begin by being incorrigibles? Wouldn't it be well to give 'em just one chance, poor creatures, of learning something that isn't the "public" and the "pawnshop," and then thieves' tricks in gaol? Reformatories! I see you shape the word. Ah, well! I'm a

prison-warder, not a reformatory guy. But just let me whisper in your ear. The reformatories want at least quite as much overhauling as convict-prisons do. If you want to sweep out the stable thoroughly, you must begin at the extreme end. If reformatories were not conducted by old women (not always of the same sex as the old 'ooman who got stuck) their results would be better, maybe, than they are. But as I'm a prison-warder, never mind them, or they'll swear I'm jealous.'

It looks as if I was working up into a tantrum again, doesn't it? My stars! What a bad opinion you will have of me! I've growled a bit, and found fault, for that's the privilege of every true-born Briton; and my life's a dreary one—that's a fact. And now for a change—just to set myself to rights—I'll have a good snap at you, ladies and gents; that's to say, 'the Public'—nothing to do with the tavern, mind; though perhaps you think I know more of that than about you. You listen with open ears and mouths and eyes to the mewing of ex-convicts; you forget that malignant snarling is their only poor

revenge. You cry out, 'Oh lor'! poor dears! ain't they used shocking! Giv' 'em a little wine and water, and a good blow-out at Christmas; and make 'em happy and fat, and reform 'em and make 'em honest—there's dear good warders!' That's mighty fine, ladies and gents; but how about your own part of the business—a part which is your province, and not ours? You hand us over a parcel of rascals, and say, 'Lock up the nasty lubbers, and pull 'em round a bit.' We lock 'em up, and pull 'em round as much as we can, and then return 'em to you again. What do you do? Do you give 'em a helping hand? Do you say, 'Well, poor chaps, you've burnt your fingers, and learnt a lesson, and so here's another chance?' Not you! What Spevins said in that scoffing, cynical way of his is true—perfectly and awfully and fearfully true! That many men return to crime is *your fault more than their own*; for you shout from the top of the stairs, 'Be good, and eat your pudding, and don't kick up a row,' while all the time you've shut the kitchen door and locked it. What's the use of our reforming men (given even that we

can do that), if you are to kick 'em into the gutter when we give 'em back to you? No. Your Royal Commissions, and your lunches, and your pickles, and your fine speeches in Parliament about the prison system, are so much bunkum till you've set that right. If all the archangels were to lay their golden wigs together to invent a system, it wouldn't and couldn't work properly till you've settled what's to be done with prisoners when their time is up.

The Prisoners' Aid Societies are lovely, doubtless—one, I think, is even dubbed 'Royal,' after her Gracious Majesty—God bless her!—but what they do is very little, and must be very little till the question's taken seriously up. Go round, as I have often done, with a heavy heart, to each old lag on a long landing, and ask him what the Prisoners' Aid Societies did for him when he last went out. The secretaries of various Prisoners' Aid Societies will be down, I dare say, upon the old tar for telling tales out of school, and will show beautiful books, of course. But I can't help that. I prefer to believe the prisoners in this matter because they one and

all sing the same song. You spend too much on ornament, I say to these societies; and you've no business to spend the money of poor bruised and fallen creatures, unless you can assure them an equivalent in such work as they are suited for. You mean well, I don't doubt; but that ain't enough, my lads. Go along a prison landing, the first that comes, ladies and gents—it doesn't matter where—and hear what the prisoners have got to say upon the subject, and mark how sore they are, and how they feel they're wronged; and I'll bet a dollar that you'll be considerably surprised. In this instance, the prisoner's word may be taken to be of some value; for his charges are direct, and he would gain nothing by telling lies.

Well now! Here in my office, as it happens, are some of the lovely books—sweetly bound, surelie!—a bundle of annual reports. I'll take one up at hazard, the first that comes. Let us glance over this one, which chances to be for the year ending December, 1878. First, there are a lot of what they are pleased to call 'specimen-cases,' purporting to be letters of thanks from

mystically initialled persons, which remind me a good deal too much of the mysterious specimen-cures of the quack doctors. 'Dear sir, I have been for ten years suffering from an incurable liver complaint; but on taking one of your pills I recovered in five minutes.' All that sort of thing. These cases may be genuine. I hope they are, with all my heart. It's a curious coincidence that none of the men who have come under my charge have ever been fortunate enough to obtain help from any of these societies; and I've had many thousands under lock and key in my time. What says the balance-sheet before me? Rent, salaries, and office-expenses (in round numbers), £700. That seems a good deal, doesn't it? But perhaps the public subscribes its millions.

Amounts received on account of male prisoners (that means gratuities paid by government to give the chaps a chance), £2700.

Amounts paid by the society on behalf of prisoners (that is in attempts, more or less unsuccessful, to get work for them), £2800.

What do you make of that? I make out,

but p'raps I'm an old stoopid, that this society, which issues pretty reports, *spends seven times as much money upon itself and its salaried officers as it does on those whom it makes believe to assist!* How's that, mess-mate? *Makes believe*, I say advisedly, without any intention of implying fraud. The evidence of the prisoners and those who are over them, all points to the fact that the good done is almost nil. The society spends a hundred a year in looking for work which doesn't come; it would be quite as well to add that amount at once to the already huge salary list, and make no more bother about the criminals.

And now you'll say, I suppose, that I grumble a lot and don't offer a remedy. Well, then, let us try to see how these things could be improved. In the first place, the Aid Societies resent interference of any kind on the part of prison officials. They say, 'You send us the men, and ask no questions.' Now that's ridiculous, at the outset. Surely governors and chaplains—those who have been in close communication with their charges during their sentence (for some

of the chaplains really do their work, and some of the governors take an interest in their prisoners)—should be allowed to be on the committee of the societies? Who more competent than they that have studied the men for years through all their phases, to point out the most deserving cases and the best way of assisting them? Perhaps, too, the public would be more likely to give certain gaol-birds another chance if the recommendation was endorsed by the governor and the chaplain, instead of being only signed by a parcel of gents who are nobodies and who can't possibly know anything individually of the man recommended. As it is, I could point out one chaplain who has not been unsuccessful in his own small way in getting berths for *protégés* through his own unaided influence; therefore the question isn't so hopeless as it looks. If the thing were done on the quiet, much might be achieved in the way of emigration, *if the public would only help*. A system might be organised, too, county by county, whereby a man might be met at the prison-door and spirited away at once to a part of England where he is not known and

where bad influences would not have full play, instead of being kept kicking his heels and eating out his heart to no purpose in London, where, when he discovers how broken is the reed he's asked to lean on, he inevitably falls back among his old pals, through sheer hopelessness.

But to arrive at this the public must come forward—that public which is always generous when its sympathies are aroused, and when it knows it can trust those to do their best who collect the money. As matters stand, I'm not surprised that people are indifferent. They look at the mysterious reports which don't mean anything at all, and they know that the committees therein advertised are made up of dolls. They know that the aristocratic gentlemen on those committees have their own business to attend to, and are content to give their subscriptions and their names and to suppose by this trifling trouble they have paved the road to heaven. They know that such real business as is actually accomplished is done by persons who are very nice people, no doubt, across a dinner-table, but who have no weight and no in-

fluence. If I was a gent at large, and one of these persons came to me and asked me to give an ex-convict a chance as a servant, I'd say :

‘What do you know of him, and who are you that recommend him ? It stands to reason that you know nothing of him of your own knowledge ; and if you did, it wouldn't help the matter, because your recommendation is of no value.’

That's how it is, messmates, that these societies (with the best intentions in the world, I daresay) are of so little practical use. Enlist the prison-officials of the highest class in the cause—men whose recommendation would be of weight (not men like a head of the prisons department, for example, who hasn't time)—form committees consisting of half-a-dozen influential men who are not mere titled lardydas, or people who are already full of business, men who will really look into the subject and be responsible, and give their orders to their agents instead of leaving the agents, mere men of straw, to struggle along alone and hopelessly. This much being done to start with, a strong appeal may be made to the public, to which the public—trusting

its emissaries—will surely not turn a deaf ear; for the societies are good in principle (no one denies that), but they need reorganisation—absolute and complete and entire, to make them also useful in practice.

Yes, I believe in the public, though sometimes, ladies and gents, you do need a deal of shaking up. Come now! to oblige an old and faithful servant of her Majesty, do just wake up for once and look to this. Put the prisoners and the societies face to face, and see if the latter can stand before the impeachment. Bid them reorganise themselves and be quick about it, and wipe out the list of idiotic failures; and lend a sturdy hand to help them so to do; and while you're awake and busy, just whisper a word to the police in passing. Remember that a fallen creature can't walk steadily if you make his path so precious rough. I seem to be wandering from one subject to another, but I'm not, for the two run in parallel grooves. Police-supervision must be strict with the bad uns, but there can be no doubt but that for the better and more hopeful lot it's a grievous blister, which draws all the strength out of 'em.

What did it do for Jaggs, for instance, when he took refuge in the work'us? To men who'd like to reform, but who are vacillating, it does this. It takes them by the collar and flings 'em face downward on the stones—that's what it does; and then it says, 'Oh, you dirty wretch! Pah! ain't you ashamed to have covered yourself so with mud?'

You'd know, ladies and gents, if you thought about it, that a clerk who has got into a mess and is doing his hard labour, is rendered more desponding by the sad future than by the disagreeable present. Say he has his five years to do—well and good. He'll do the term bravely, under proper auspices, more often than not. But he has no chance. He's aware that when he comes out he will be unable to get employment, and that the police will tell him to earn an honest living or look out for squalls; and he'll say, 'How?—I've tried, and can't.' And then they'll say, 'Oh, go along! don't talk to us; you must!' And then he'll go to an Aid Society, and a dyspeptic youth'll yawn at him (for he's the twentieth that's called that

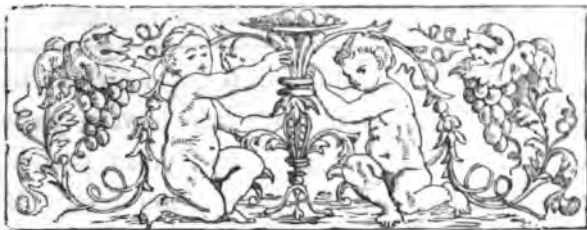
morning) and say, 'Oh, what a nuisance! There's a place on board ship! You'll have to run up and down the rigging like one o'clock—jolly and healthy, you know. A life on the ocean wave, and so forth.' And then t'other 'll answer timidly (many rebuffs will have made him timid), 'If you please, by profession I'm a clerk. I've never been to sea, and am seasick even on the way to Margate; and I shall break my neck, and who then will look after my poor wife who has lingered—God knows how, and I only wish she hadn't, for now she'll starve—during the time I was locked up?' There's only one end to that fellow, Mr. and Mrs. Public—despair and recklessness and habitual crime; and knowing from the experience of others that such must be his end, while he's being preached at by the parson during his first lagging, he don't care to pull himself together—why should he? Is it a wonder that men shrug their shoulders and don't try? They're the wise ones, I'm bound to confess, though I'm a prison-officer. The end's bound to be the same—a little sooner, that's all; and think of the heartburnings and disappointments that

are economised by swift declension! As matters stand, the system would work well enough (as I've said afore, we can't expect perfection) if prisoners were certain that they'd have fair play when their term's up. It's all very well for men with private friends; I'm not talking of course of them. I'm talking of the homeless, solitary creatures who see through the prison-gate only a great cold dark desert without a shrub for shelter, a drop of water to quench their thirst, or an ear of corn for food. They are told to walk about in that desert and be jolly. At one edge of it—the nearer edge—they see a low shambling pothouse, ruinous but warm, with mulled ale simmering on the hearth, a joint of roast beef upon the spit. There's good shelter there, and something to fill the belly. If the crazy roof falls in upon the inmates, it can't be helped. Is it a wonder that the released prisoners prefer to run the risk of the roof tumbling in instead of walking gaily out at once into absolute starvation? There, there! ladies and gents—sentimental, transcendental creatures who make a pother over a spiteful ex-convict's whine,

why don't you take up this matter in real earnest? You're mouthing pharisees, I regret to tell you, clad in rich robes over foul underlinen. You weep buckets over the fable of the good Samaritan, and tell each other what a perfect gentleman he was; and the next minute, when you come upon a wounded man yourselves, pass quickly by like the Levite with your noses between finger and thumb, for fear lest the wounds might offend your nostrils! Do your dooty. See that the men have a chance if they try to reform, and then growl as much as you please at the prison system. We'll bear it! Take the beam out of your own eye first—then take the mote from ourn if you choose.


Now look at that! That's twice I've got in a real downright passion. The first time with the snivelling, yowling, hypocritical ex-felons; the second time with a more lofty and impudent and exasperating hypocrisy. For, ladies and gents, at bottom it's all your own doing. Do remember that! It can't be helped if I'm rude—the fault of that also lies with you, not me—yet for politeness'

sake, to smooth you down a bit, as I want you to do me a favour, I'll pretend, if you like, to be sorry, in that I've again got into a tantrum and blurted out just one or two home-truths.



CHAPTER III.

MR. SCARRAWEG'S THIRD GROWL.

N second thoughts, I won't pretend to be sorry for having been cross with you, ladies and gents ; because, with your mincing ways and artificial manners, it's a kindness to show you a spade and call it one sometimes. But I'm sorry that my temper made me imprudent ; and so, as I really am honest, if rough, and mean well, I hope humbly that you'll stand between me and my lords if so be as they're vicious and turn me out of my berth. I doubt if they will, for they mean well too, I believe, and will overlook a free-spoken old chap's zeal ; not but what I feel a sinking in having been fool enough to send that there schedule to the printer's. It's the real one for the

autumn of 1878, and I'm not quite clear that the Home Office bigwigs like having papers of that sort bandied about; more partikler when they tell such a tale as this does. But cheer up! The public ought to see those things, and, if so be as I'm turned out, I'll go down and call upon her Gracious Majesty—God bless her!—at Buckingham Palace, where she's always to be found, I'm told, by her loyal lieges, and show her my medal, with my best scrape of the left foot, and remind her (which she's safe to remember when she sees me) that she pinned it on my breast with her own royal pin, which went right through my heart as well as my jacket, and ask her to intercede for an old salt.

Now that's real queer, or would be! It's real queer that I should stick to my berth so tight, and yet be always complaining of it. Well, well. Living along with convicts is contaminating, no doubt. Aboard the *Arethusa* I was content enough; but what's the use of going back to those halcyon days? That's a good word, and you'll wonder how I learnt it. Bless your heart alive! I've learnt a power of words, and things too, since

I left the navy. As I don't go out with the parties myself when they leave for labour, I've a good deal of time on hand, in spite of office-work, and our little library's a godsend to me ; and if so be as you like to send us some books, I know all the officers will be very thankful.

Yes, it's funny to think that I should be afraid of getting the sack ; and I buried alive in the centre of this infernal bog, with no hope of ever being promoted any more. In summer it's not quite so bad, because now and then a gent comes fishing down the streams, and parties come picnicking to look at the scenery, and leave old bottles and bits of paper about, which is cheerful and sociable, like Friday's foot in the sand, showing that there's other folk in the world besides us prison-folk. And the tourists admire the place vastly, for there's a power of wild-flowers, and they say the sunsets are particularly fine ; but I'm not a fair judge of those things, because my duties make me see more of the sunrise than is pleasant. But in the winter ! My conscience ! It's a sore trial to younger bones than mine. The warders are

half frozen to death watching the labour-parties in the quarry or on the bog ; for they've got to stand still, with their eyes wide open, while the convicts can keep themselves warm by work. And then the days when the blanket-fogs come down, sticking in your throat like tufts of wool, and making your eyes smart again as you feel your way across the yard ; and the long dull evenings.

We've got a nice recreation-room, to be sure, with a brisk fire, and a library and a billiard-room, where we can sit and chat when not on duty, and we do sit there mostly rather than go home ; for (as if we weren't miserable enough already) six families are put to live in each of the houses, with only one staircase and one door, and you can imagine the quarrelling of the wives and the screaming, up and downstairs, when Tommy has been playing in the hall without wiping his feet, or throwing tea-leaves on somebody's head, between the balusters ; for some have children and some haven't, and those that haven't can't be expected to like mess and flue in their hair, and cleaning up their hall and passage day and night after ~~other~~

people's brats. Then we've a string-band that plays quite heavenly, though it's a bit worriting when they're learning something new, and are groping about among the notes. We've an assistant-warder who's a first-class flute ; and another who'd make you split your sides with laughing when he blacks his face and rattles the bones. For we've a nigger minstrel company—oh yes ! and gave a grand entertainment last Christmas in the Duchy Inn, with whisky and water and negus for the ladies, to which everybody came and was delighted. The governor himself looked in for a minute, quite affable ; and the chaplain and his lady, and the doctor and his—all the tip-top company of the place. There isn't much of it, that's sure ; but what there is is spicy. And the shopkeeper and his lady came—we've only one shop, but it's a wonderful shop, where you can buy any mortal thing, from a coffin to a stay-lace—and he was pleased to say he hadn't spent such a merry Christmas for many a long year, which was kind and friendly of him, wasn't it ?

We manage to keep our blood from drying up, there being a lot of us, and most of us

married men ; but it isn't so with the gentle-folk, and they don't have a good old time. You see there's no society for 'em, and they're too few to form a circle for themselves. There's no visiting nearer than Tavistock, which is eight miles away, with a woeful road. To be sure there's a church and a parson, independent of the prison ; but it's a queer church, and a queerer parson—or used to be—I don't know much of the new gent.

You see, Princetown is a chapel-of-ease to Lidford, which is the biggest and least populated parish in all England. As there's no one to go to church, it doesn't matter whom they send there, does it ? And they have sent some rum' uns, I can tell you—dipso-maniacs, mostly. Nobody else would come, for the rector of Lidford only paid his parson £80 a year, and charged him twelve bob a week rent, and no end of extras. Yes ; I've seen some queer old screws of parsons here ! One of 'em was always so drunk that two mourners used to have to hold him up while he read the burial service, and I used to think that the convict-dress would suit that chap better than his surplice. But there's a

new rector at Lidford now, I hear ; so perhaps that's all changed. But the sottish old parsons weren't much good in the way of society for the gentlefolk, were they ?

In the time of our late governor—that's him as Ebenezer christened 'the martinet'—our swells couldn't hit it off at all. Our wives quarrel enough among themselves, Lord knows ; but it was nothing to these nobs. They didn't scream and cackle, as our wives do, but they quarrelled none the less. Bless your dear heart, it was awful ! There was only the governor, who was a bachelor, and the deputy, also a bachelor ; and the chaplain and the doctor, who were both married. The chaplain had a mother-in-law ; so that makes four gents and three ladies. And do you think they could hit it off ? Not they. The mother-in-law was always interfering, and telling the doctor that his wife read too many novels, and telling the wife that her husband smoked too many pipes, and holding up her own daughter and her husband as models to imitate, which was, of course, provoking. And then she would talk to the convicts when she met them on the

road, and ask them Bible questions, and feel their souls as if they were pulses ; and didn't that rile the governor ? Once there was a real flare-up, when the governor (who was a good sort, when he wasn't peeping through spy-holes, if a little too much of a disciplinarian), came strutting round the corner and found the mother-in-law in deep confab with an old lag.

‘What’s the meaning of this ?’ he roared out. ‘Where’s the warder who has charge of this rascal ?’

‘He’s took ill with cholic in the inside,’ she says, as hoity-toity as you please ; ‘so he’s sitting by the fire in our kitchen, and I’m looking after the old man. He won’t run away, for he’s too weak in his legs, and besides, I’ve promised him a bit of bread-and-butter if he’s quiet, and I’m improving him as to a future state.’

But though that old gal thought she could manage everyone, she found the governor a bit too much for her. He packed off the warder with the cholic, who recovered in no time, and spoke out so severe to the chaplain, and threatened such awful things as to

what the Home Office people would do, that the doctor and his wife didn't try to conceal their glee at the prospect of the enemy being discomfited; and then there was a jolly rumpus all round. The governor didn't speak to the chaplain's family, and the chaplain's family didn't speak to the doctor's family; and when one lady met another in the road, they both looked through each other with turned-up noses and sniffings, and then went home to their husbands and had hysterics, and said they were insulted. This was pretty bad, considering that they'd read all their books, and sometimes the noospapers went wrong for days together, and they'd nothing to think of but their grievances; but something happened just then which made it worse. It was at the time when the Scripture-reader was frozen; one of the stiffest winters we had had for years, and they were none of them mild. The snow lay upon the moor for weeks, and the tempestuous winds swirled it into dangerous eddies. Christmas arrived, but we were literally snowed up. The usual carts from Tavistock didn't arrive, and the gentlefolk,

who were going to have private rival festivities, out of spite, all alone by themselves, were in a quandary. The doctor's family had a leg of mutton left, but was out of coals. The chaplain's family were well enough off for fuel, but hadn't a bit of meat. You suppose that they made up their quarrels for the sake of their stomachs, don't you? They didn't do anything of the kind. The men would have been glad to do so, but their women would not let them. The doctor's family broke up three kitchen-chairs and a bookcase to roast the mutton by; and the chaplain's family lived for five days and nights on plum-pudding and mince-pies, and comforted themselves with the contemplation of a more blissful future in another world.

Don't you think they envied the convicts their strong broth? But let us get back to business. I was looking over the proofs just now of Ebenezer's manuscript, and came upon what Mr. Tilgoe said about the 'tax-payers.' It was an ingenious idea to try and frighten John Bull by pointing to his pocket; but unfortunately for the Reverend

Aurelius, his statements have no foundation in fact, as can easily be shown. He says that all convict labour is bad and unremunerative, which, as all sweeping statements are, is a lie. Look at the new prison halls which have recently been built, here at Dartmoor, at Pentonville, at Wormwood Scrubs, etc. All built by convict labour ; masonry of the best class. Look at the Portland Breakwater ; the noble basins which have been growing at Chatham within the last twenty years ; vast constructions of concrete faced with granite, which will stand as long as England does. Their only fault is that they are too perfect—too highly wrought and artistically finished—too beautiful for the purpose which they have to serve. Look at the steel models made for the use of the artillery—elegant playthings worked up in the highest style—the parquetry flooring manufactured for the Admiralty—the elaborate stone bas-reliefs in St. Peter's church at Portland. All convict labour—every bit of it—which can hold its own beside any skilled labour of free men. Unhappily the public do not see these things ; more's the

pity. Well, let us take something that they do see—the clothing of the Metropolitan Police.

Every coat, every pair of trousers, every boot worn by a London policeman is made in a convict prison—and very well made they are. We turn out at Dartmoor alone nine thousand pair of boots a year; what do you think of that? But the silly falsehoods of these ex-convicts (may the *ex* soon vanish!) make me feel rather poorly again. One says that Dartmoor might be made 'to blossom like the rose.' It is clear that that person was never a member of a bog party there, or he would have a painful remembrance of the substratum of granite which underlies the bog and peeps out at every yard or two. As it happens, that bog-work at Princetown is about the only convict labour that really is unremunerative, for, considering the trouble of it, the land isn't worth reclaiming, and the frequent fogs and rains keep the bog parties inside the prison walls much too often. So you see, in his statement about the rose, this fellow lies as in other things, which makes me feel better,

for I like people to be consistent when they can.

But what does it signify, I should like to know, in the long-run, whether the system pays or not? Penal settlements ain't speculations the only object of whose existence is to make money. Of course it's well that convicts should be made to work out their keep as much as possible; but if ends don't exactly meet, it can't be helped. And considering all the drawbacks and difficulties which are thrown in our way, we get quite as much out of our gaol-birds as we have a right to expect. These convict writers are constantly stultifying themselves. Individually, they are poor martyrs who are very illused, and true objects for the pity of the public. They ought to have been petted, instead of being worried; but at the same time they declare that all except themselves are idle loons who are not worked half hard enough. Isn't that something like what you might call a paradox? It's a sad fact that the criminal class will exist; that, when the scamps are taken, they must be locked up, and that when locked up they will cost some-

thing. Poor John Bull knows that, but he's on the horns of a what-d'ye-call-it. For he'd like to grind as much as he can besides whining out of the wicked wretches, but doesn't dare push his prerogative too far for fear of his sons and daughters who have nerves.

If Miss Maria caught him giving the fascinating burglar as hard a task as he'd give to one of his own paid labourers who's been too stupid to go astray, she'd have fits upon the door-mat, and call papa a brute, and make his home uncomfortable. If Miss Maria would only mind her worsted-work, or even take to making cookery messes at South Kensington, her par would act more sensibly than now he can ; and yet for all that, his servants watch his interests, and in this difficulty, as in others, steer skilfully between the rocks.

Miss Maria has a will of her own, and is not over-wise ; and is given to interfering. One day she stamped her foot, and said :

‘Par, that blessed burglar, with the nice side-curls, who looks so big and burly, has got consumption. Don't say he hasn't, because I know he has, for I have heard him

cough, and whatever you do, don't contradict. What's the good of broad shoulders and immense calves if your lungs are touched? His lungs are touched. I know it! So look out, and don't you dare to give him more than six hours work a day. And, if he coughs again, lend him a comforter. Stay! I'll knit one with my own fair fingers.'

And she did. What does her par do, the old dog? He whispers to his steward:

'Don't disobey Miss Maria, for goodness gracious' sake, or she'll tease; and, being rich, I'll do anything for a quiet life. Work her burglar—for whom she shows, I must say, a most improper admiration—six hours a day, no more; but during that time see that he doesn't idle.'

Don't it strike you, ladies and gents, as a wee bit ungrateful that, Miss Maria having settled the hours, her burglar should whip round and jeer her par because he can't force the lazy devil's body to earn all its sustenance? Yet so it is. Her par's steward does his best. The day's tale of work may be short, perhaps, owing to Miss Maria's nerves, but it'll be good, or that steward will

know the reason why. Under existing circumstances, that's all he can try to do.

At Chatham, as you know, the work's extra hard. Miss Maria doesn't often stroll that way ; but then, the steward being fearful lest she might, gives a higher scale of diet. The invalids can't do anything except go wrong—which they'd do very well indeed if you'd give them the chance ; so, in the general shaking up of the remunerative results of convict labour, you've got to take into consideration : firstly, Miss Maria's nerves ; secondly, Miss Maria's unwholesome fad for burglars ; thirdly, the fact that able-bodied burglars don't like quarrying, and don't do more than they can help ; fourthly, that invalid burglars can't do any work, except in the matter of finishing the education of neophytes, which is not precisely productive of economy to Government. Therefore it's a never-ending marvel to me that anything tangible is squeezed out of them at all.

Yet here are the facts. After clothing the rascallions—if not in silk attire, at least in wool—with gaiters, when their poor

dear calves feel chilly, and stout shoes and stockings and oversmocks when their poor dear bodies feel ditto, and mittens when they have chilbains, (this is really true: many a pair of mittens have I had served out); after filling their bellies with such food as few agricultural labourers ever look upon; after warming their cells and halls with hot air, tempered by a thermometer, as if they were stove-plants; after giving them cod-liver oil, and wine and jelly when they're ill, or pretend to be, and a new suit of clothes if they spoil their own, and keeping their hair nice and short free gratis for nothing, into the bargain—after all these advantages (which cost money, mind you) we actually manage to economise upon them to this extent.

The inmate of a borough gaol is calculated to cost the unfortunate par of Miss Maria an average of £20 per head over and above the value of his labour. The inmate of one of our convict prisons costs an average only of nine pounds per head over and above the value of his labour. What with his lying, his hypocrisy, his laziness, his sham con-

sumption, and Miss Maria's nerves, I look upon that as a very wonderful result indeed ; and should like to shake hands all round upon the strength of it.

I would quote figures for you—I've got 'em all before me now—but then I recall the 'little slip' I made (bless me, I'm just like Tilgoe!) with reference to that bit of a schedule about the educational department. If I dared to show up for you all the results of Miss Maria's delicate susceptibilities—why, there, you'd be having fits yourself on the door-mat, as she has when crossed ; and Lord knows, one who's up to those games in a small establishment is more than enough. I'll just say this much, however. Isn't it remarkable how glib these ex-convicts are in statistics? How did they learn 'em? Did they penetrate into the governor's office, open his great safe, and peruse his books? I do that, because it's my duty—and not a gay one neither—and so I see ropes that pull the machine, all bare and stringy—(oh, that awful schedule!)—which no convict or ex-convict can by any possibility see, unless he makes burglarious entrances into my own

sanctum or the governor's, or else breaks into the Home Office itself. But he don't do that. It's easier to invent, and to hood-wink Miss Maria—may Heaven bless the little darling!

Mr. E. A. Bernays, who's superintending engineerin Chatham dockyard—and a pleasant gent, though he has got mathematics on the brain, which is his misfortune, not his fault—tells me that the convicts earn all round an average of eighteenpence a day, which is more than I should have thought probable. He says that there are circumstances inseparable from the condition of prisoners which prevent a man doing so much as he might, even in the short hours assigned to labour. If a party goes out, say, and when it reaches its post finds that it has left a tool behind, it must either do without it for the time or all march back in a body to fetch it. One warder can't be in two places at once, and he can't detach a prisoner to go away alone. Thus Mr. Bernays's estimate is as satisfactory as we can hope when he tells us (and if any man dares to question the statistics of Mr. Bernays, he had best look out, I can tell

him !) that, spite of marching backwards and forwards twice a day, with other drawbacks, two convicts can be calculated roughly to do the work of one free man, on day-work ; and that three convicts will do the work of a free man on piecework. Of the able-bodied class, he says that three convicts are equal to two ordinary labourers ; whilst in the matter of light labour two convicts are equal to one free man. He bids us observe, also, that one great difficulty in dealing with convict labour is that men *of all capacities* have, during work hours, to be mixed together. But then, on the other hand, whilst a proportion are weak or imbecile, a considerable number of convicts are persons of superior intelligence ; men who, if coaxed into docility, can be trained to anything, and taught to master a trade in an incredibly short time. Bricklayers, masons, carpenters, can be manufactured in three or four months ; weavers, bootmakers, tailors, in six or eight. Take a man like Benson now, the cunning of whose exploits at the Mansion House and in the Goncourt case have compelled your admiration. What could not that man do if he

were willing? At this minute he is book-binding at Portsmouth. Many a gent would like to have his volumes bound as well as are the books in the Portsmouth library.

Chatting about Benson reminds me of Roupell, and that again reminds me of the lies which one of the ex-convicts has thought fit to tell of him. It is not true that he was ever made a favourite except in consequence of his good conduct; but his behaviour was so uniformly admirable that he improved his position—as was fair he should—step by step, till he attained the envied position of head-nurse; and when in the infirmary was so devoted to his patients as more than once to endanger his own health. And this recalls to my mind a case in point of convict gratitude. Roupell was watching a patient suffering from lung disease, complicated with trouble about the heart. He sat up with that patient for twenty nights, dozing as he could by day, looking after his comfort as if he had been of his own kindred; and it turned out eventually that the man was a ‘malingerer,’ shamming for the sake of idleness and broth! Good luck go with Roupell, say I. There

was a prisoner to whose honour you might trust, although he had once fallen. There are none under whom he served but wish him a peaceful ending. If ever sinner atoned for his sin by meekness, that sinner did. He bore his mast-heading without complaint, and he a gentleman lag too. God grant him in due time a snug berth aloft!

A favourite indeed! If a man behaves well it is proper that he should be favoured, and Roupell was well treated both by governor and warders. And here's a curious little point in the system which I think my lords might have taken notice of last time they went out for a free lunch. Governors are endowed by the rules with a good many means of punishment, *but none of reward*. If A behaves badly he loses marks, feeds on bread and water, or lives on penal diet. Then perhaps he's put in irons, loses privileges, goes into 57 Party, assaults an officer—is flogged. That is all very well, but how about the other side of the medal? Take Roupell's case, for instance. With the best intentions, what could the governor do to soften his lot? He is not allowed, under any circumstances, to

put a man into the blue or privileged class until twelve months before the end of his sentence. He is not allowed to give him special diet. He is not even allowed to permit him extra facilities for communicating with his friends. He may allow him to write sooner than the regulation time, but not more frequently. In my humble opinion the Scripture-reader was perfectly right to ignore the existence of such a rule in Miffy's case ; and if I were a governor I'd do the same whenever I thought proper ; for if a governor is fit for his position, he ought to be allowed free latitude in these things. If he thinks that a particular man would be the better for receiving a few words once a week from one who loves him, or a photo, or what not, he ought surely to be allowed to act on his discretion. The system's very nice, and works well enough ; but in my humble opinion (and I'm not supposed to be able to judge of such matters) there's quite as much red tape about it as about most English affairs. Red tape is the curse of England. Isn't it ridiculous that in such petty details as (merely using this as one example out of many) letter-

writing and so forth the governor of a great establishment, who is held responsible for the well-being of fifteen hundred men, should have to appeal solemnly, and apply to headquarters and make reports instead of acting at once as he thinks fit? And then look at all the little rules and regulations; how vexatious many of them are, how foolish and futile; how calculated to fret excitable natures without corresponding benefit.

Take a bunch of penal records out of the clerk's press, and run your eye down the report pages. What rubbish it is to report men for such trivial nonsense! I have to stand every day beside my master in the adjudication-room, and the grave reports that are made of offences which are of no consequence whatever take my appetite away. Such a man *looked* insolent—he did not say or do anything, mind. Such a man turned his cap inside out—how sinful! Such another cocked it on one side instead of wearing it straight—a desperate crime!—and then got into worse trouble, for, exasperated by the red-tape leading-strings, he swore at the officer who objected to a cap being worn upon

one side. Poor Spevins, good-tempered though he was, was nearly driven out of his mind because I was always at him about his blankets. And yet I couldn't help it. It was my duty, and the governor would have clobbered me over the head if I had not acted as I did. And here's another opinion of mine, which will send all the big wigs into convulsions. *Why such a fuss about tobacco?* More prison troubles arise over tobacco than all the rest put together twice over—as much to warders, who, seeing how silly is the regulation, are the more open to receive fivers for bringing it in, as to the prisoners. I believe I'm right in saying that ours is the only penal code in which this rule is attempted to be strictly carried out, and one more fruitful in nagging and worrying and consequent insubordination it would be impossible to find.

Now what do you think I've taken the trouble to do just to make the thing complete? I've written to the heads of departments in three great countries for information with regard to a comparison of their prison system with ours, and those bigwigs have been kind enough to answer the old tar. In

America tobacco is allowed because it saves bother. In Germany (so writes Dr. Mittelstaad, Oberlandesgerichtsrath) *smoking* is not allowed, but snuff is ; and tobacco for chewing is allowed when considered judicious by prison authorities. With regard even to liquor, the Germans find it prudent not to be vexatious ; for 'drunkards are not to have their drink cut off all at once, lest their health should suffer in consequence.'

'In France,' writes a high authority, 'wine forms part of the daily regimen of convicts at hard labour, and all convicts may buy a modicum of wine at the cantines. Snuffing and chewing tobacco are allowed, but smoking interdicted, as in Germany. But,' adds the same candid gentleman, '*the convicts manage to smoke on the sly.*' He also adds : 'The French system must not be taken as a pattern, for, I regret to say, it is marked by too great tolerance and lamentable want of discipline in all departments. *Les condamnés le savent bien, car ils préfèrent le bagne à la prison, et beaucoup s'arrangent de façon pour y être condamnés.*'

There ! that's French, ladies and gents,

which p'raps you know how to translate for yourselves. Anyway, the three great countries all agree in differing from us on the subject of permitting tobacco. They allow or wink at it because it's soothing and conducive to general harmony. Remember that if Eve had not been commanded not to touch a particular fruit she would probably never have glanced at the tree which bore it. Preferring mulberries, she would not have hankered after apples. If the authorities did not hold out the possession of a bit of tobacco no bigger than your finger-nail as the most heinous of crimes, there would not be so much trafficking to obtain it. Maybe it's bad to permit felons to enjoy a luxury, but you have to look at which of two evils is the least. To some men tobacco is really a necessary of life, and they will move heaven and earth to get it; and others, out of idleness or mischief, will follow suit. Depend upon it, if we followed in this the example of our neighbours, there would be fewer complaints, men would be more tractable, and warders would be less tempted.

Well, I'm growing garrulous, I reckon—

a positive noosance; but bear with an old chap a little longer, for I haven't much to add. Talking of men being tractable brings me to think of the 'incurrigibles.' There's a question which my lords will be called upon to look into some day, and at no distant date. What's to be done with the habitual criminals who decline to work, and who only go out to come in again? What's to be done with 57 Party? We're not allowed to transport 'em any more, for the colonies object to our carting our human cinders into their back garden; and year by year the incurrigibles are multiplying on our hands in an alarming manner. I suppose Miss Maria would screech if we were to smother 'em on the quiet. It has been suggested that they might be isolated—locked up alone on light diet to do light labour, say basketmaking, and never see anyone but warders. That would make invalids of them, and then they'd go into hospital and become worse than ever. It has also been suggested to try whipping. Not the cat. No; bless your dear eyes! some of 'em feel like heroes under that; but the birch, like naughty little boys at school. I fancy the effect of the

birch would be surprising upon a great bullet-headed, six foot, hulking ruffian. It might be on some, but not on all. Anyway, to prevent their accumulating here, I'd draft a batch off to Cyprus, to drain the unhealthy land and make harbours and good roads. What a great idea! But keep it dark, lest Miss Maria should have hysterics again. She doesn't object to soldiers being packed off there to die like cattle with the murrain; but she'll go off screeching if her blessed burglars with the Newgate knockers are sent. And yet I'd try it when she was looking the other way. Miss Maria's par will have to look about him shortly and seek out a fresh field for convict labour, for, as I mentioned in gossiping about something else just now, in four years at most the works at Portsmouth and Portland and Chatham will be finished, and what's to happen to the blessed burglar then? Send him to Cyprus, I repeat. It's a big guano-bed, I'm told; dangerous to man in its present state, but capable of great things, with trouble. Make a penal establishment of it. Dig it and trench it till it 'blossoms like the rose.' Cayenne is not

healthy ; yet that point is not looked on as a disadvantage by the French, for in the midst of indiscipline, it adds a deterrent terror to the idea of transportation. Renovate Cyprus by means of convict labour ; build airy barracks there ; then let it be occupied by troops, if you like.

Phew ! There, I've done, and I'm glad I've said my say ; for it's eased my mind and occupied it too, when otherwise I should have been yawning over the fire. Now Mr. Ebenezer'll take up his thread, and you'll see the 'strange things that happened to him. To think that his good angel should have slept such a long sleep—dear heart alive !

* * * * *

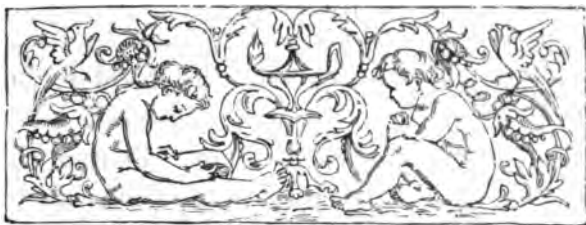
Don't forget to speak up for an old chap, if I get into hot water over that schedule. I know you won't. Good-night.

(Signed) J. SCARRAWEG,
Chief-warder.

P.S.—I hope I've not stamped too hard on anybody's corn. If I have, I hope he'll cut it, and not me.—J. S.

PART III.

THE AVENGER SPEAKS.



CHAPTER I.

LIBERTY.

FREE! Yes, I was free, after twelve years of bondage. As I and a few more were being driven to Horrabridge to take the train for town, I looked backward wistfully—half sorry to depart. Are we not all a little sorry to leave a home, however rough and squalid it may be? When we have decided that such and such contingencies will take place—that certain events must inevitably come to pass—is it not with a wrench that we discover we were wrong? If you thoroughly accept an idea, it winds itself about your being, and becomes part and parcel with yourself, even though it may be terrible and harassing. I had quite convinced myself that I was

to die at Dartmoor ; that the world for me until my dying day was to consist of the gaunt barrack, with its many blinking windows ; the undulating, chameleon downs, bounded like the sea by a straight, far-off horizon ; that the mustard-toned uniform was to be my attire till it was doffed in favour of the windingsheet. Yet here was I, trundling rapidly away through the soft September air, dressed in a neat suit of tweed, fashioned by prison hands, with a wideawake upon my head instead of the hideous bonnet.

Though for several years I had been counting the days, yet when the moment came which was to see me pass through the cordon of civil guards without an armed escort at my heels, I could scarcely realise the situation—it appeared so wonderful. But it was a fact, nevertheless ; no longer a worshipped vision. The old, familiar quarry, where I had endured my bloody sweat, was to know me no more—I was passing it now as a stranger might—was whirled by, and it stretched not forth its arms to hold me. A party in the familiar uniform who were sweeping the road looked after us with a

dreary longing. A sudden dip hid them and the prison from our sight. Our faces were turned towards the world now—the busy, fretful, seething, cruel ocean, which had thrown me up high and dry upon the sharp and jagged rocks.

But I was destined to slip back into the waters; to return again into the world. And yet not so. Just as the cultured painter died when the doors of the gaol were closed on him, so in like manner was the Ebenezer dead who arrived eleven years ago at Dartmoor. This was quite another being who was emerging from the tomb to that other one who had been consigned to it. Old Scarraweg, as we stood prepared to start, squeezed my hand with encouraging words, which awoke no answering flutter of gratitude in my breast :

‘ You’re a mysterious party !’ he grumbled. ‘ We know nothing of your belongings ; for through all the years you’ve been here you’ve persisted in never receiving a visit or a letter. Have you friends to go to ? How do you know that they’re alive ? or are you going to apply to a Society ?’

‘I have friends, never fear,’ I answered, with assumed gaiety. ‘So that I shall not have to lean on any such broken reed.’

Then, as we stood waiting for the vehicle which was to bear me thence, he told me to write to him if I got into a mess, and, bidding me not to backslide from my present hopeful state, waved a farewell, and disappeared under the archway.

‘Friends! My hopeful state!’ How whimsical it was that I should always be so misread! My hopeful condition was one of concentrated hate—a thirst for vengeance on those whom I considered, in my warped mind, to be responsible for my shattered life. My friends were those which I had made within the prison walls, and who were to introduce me to others cast in the same mould.

‘No, I would not backslide,’ I said to myself, with a fierce sniff, as we drove along. When the crisis came which had riven my tortured soul, the only comforters who had stood near me were the devils who had whispered, ‘Search!’ To them I owed all my allegiance—I burned to possess the diploma

which should make me one of them. No, no! There was little fear of my backsliding. Had I not kept steadily to my resolve, with my eyes fixed upon the lurid light for the long weary years of the devil's noviciate? Why, then, should I falter now?

In due course I was received at Millbank, sat for my photograph, underwent the careful inspection of the detectives, in order that they might know my face—received my license, and was free to wander where I would. I had three pounds in my pocket, which I had earned in prison, so that there was no immediate hurry as to 'settling down.' Jaggs was not to meet me till the evening. I resolved, therefore, to have a good look at the people whose scourge I was destined to become before again retiring for a short space into private life. For our plans had been carefully arranged in hospital, and they required a second disappearance on my part for awhile.

One of the drawbacks to the grand scheme for establishing a well-baited trap for the snaring of gentlemen's gentlemen had been the necessity which I should be under of re-

porting myself once a month to the police. For all my life, mind you ! Being a 'lifer' with a ticket, the monthly surveillance of the police was never to cease (unless I chose to expatriate myself), even if I lived to be a hundred ! This difficulty would have to be surmounted by crafty scheming.

It was obvious to each and all three of us that if the proposed place of entertainment were kept by one who had perpetually to report himself at Scotland Yard, he would come to be under the inspection of the local policeman on his beat in Mayfair, who would meddle and interfere in the arrangements, and chatter of the secret to the cook. Gentlemen's gentlemen are sharp persons, and they would soon come to know that the 'affable gent' who so condescendingly courted their company was no other than a ticket-of-leave man.

Now it was evident that gentlemen's gentlemen, for their own sakes, would flee from the company of a ticket-of-leave man, however affable. The only chance of throwing them off their guard and gaining their confidence was to pose as a licensed victualler in a dilette

way—as an eccentric individual, with Radical proclivities, and money at the bank, who liked good fellows, and wasn't proud; and who, chancing to pitch his tent in a cosy corner of Mayfair, happened somehow to gather round him a *clientèle* of butlers and grooms of the chambers, who, as everybody knows, are fascinating and polished men of the world.

Nothing more easy than to set this cat-swinging, provided the difficulty of surveillance were overcome. Spevins, Jaggs, and I discussed the important topic constantly, till I felt inclined, discouraged by its knottiness, to abandon the scheme—it seemed so utterly hopeless; but Spevins's mind was set on it. It opened too gorgeous a vista in the future for the benefit of the brethren of his craft to be lightly abandoned, and so, little by little, as we talked it over in the 'farm' we crawled out of the fog in this wise.

We decided that when the last three months of my imprisonment should commence, I was to decline to grow my hair. Prisoners have odd whimsies sometimes, and whether I chose to go out with long or short hair was a

matter which could only be decided by my own taste. I was to profess to have become accustomed to short hair, and to prefer it ; to point out that others beside convicts wear short hair : Russians, Frenchmen sometimes, and persons recovering from fever. Thus my last photograph would be taken with a smooth face and a close crop ; in the same guise I should pass under the eyes of the detectives ; with the same peculiarity I should report myself at Scotland Yard as having taken lodgings in the Borough, and hint at a possible intention of leaving the country.

Having so reported myself, I was really to take lodgings in the Borough, and live there for a week or two, still close-cropped ; after which I was to be seen on board the *Baron Osy*, bound for Antwerp, and after that to report myself no more. The authorities would take it for granted that I was gone to reside abroad. But I was not to go abroad. I was to lie *perdu* in some hidden slum, which the experience of Spevins would suggest, for say six months or so, after which, with luxuriant hair and beard, I was to bloom out into the *dilettante* licensed victualler, with

persuasive manners and a heart of stone, a stranger to England and Mayfair, with no cause to know anything of the police.

The more we turned this plan over the more likely it seemed to achieve success. Ticket-of-leave men are constantly retiring abroad, and so omitting to report themselves. They are lost to sight, and there is an end of them. The peculiar circumstances of my own case, combined with my angelic behaviour after a new leaf had been turned, had induced the authorities to look into the affair before the usual time. It was not to be supposed, therefore, that I was likely again to offend against the law. I had nothing in common with habitual criminals, since my crime had been one of impulse. Being a 'lifer' under perpetual surveillance, the very wisest course I could pursue would be to turn my back on the white cliffs for ever. Hence my vanishing would awaken no surprise in Scotland Yard. Neither would the police be likely to put a finger on me in the neighbourhood where I was really to abide. Detectives have little business within the sacred precincts of Mayfair, unless specially summoned

thither by some noble lord ; and in no case would they expect to find a gaol-bird perching in that holy of holies. Say a burglary is committed in Berkeley Square. Detectives arrive and make notes ; then they consult the black register, and consider who in the long list is most likely to have done the job ; and having made up their minds on that point, seek the delinquent out in one or other of the thieves' quarters, where such gentry hang up their hats. Thus I, the invisible captain of the gang, would be safe. If one or two of the rank and file were captured now and then it would not signify ; the ranks would close up and all would go on as before. So Spevins put the matter, and both Jaggs and I were fain to admit that it was ingenious. But to insure my invisibility in the future I must lie close and quiet for a few months ; must undergo a short chrysalishood in some shy backstreet, where poor people live who are visited now and again by clergymen, not as yet by gentlemen in blue. Spevins was to select a convenient spot in the purlieus of Whitechapel perhaps, or the unctuous alleys by the riverside.

Such was to be the programme, and on

this, the first day of liberty, I deemed it permissible to make of it a red-letter day, and to enjoy myself preparatory to disappearance, in a loose and careless fashion.

I was so dazed and dizzy by reason of the rattle and hum, that staid pedestrians looked round with surprise upon the wanderer. They beheld a robust man in garments out of date, who peered into the faces of one and of another with a wild persistency ; who walked as in a dream ; starting from time to time, nodding to timeworn buildings—familiar outlines which he had thought never to see again ; who stopped at intervals and drank in deep draughts of the murky air as though in it were renewed some savour forgotten years ago.

I know not how long I wandered, or in what direction. At one moment I was flooded with a joy which, but for stern discipline, would have found vent in shrieks and capers, as now and again I stared down and felt my garments and wondered to miss the badge and broad arrows on my arm, emblems of a serfdom which has hardened other hearts than mine. With wayward feet I turned down gloomy byways, and after a step or two

turned back again, glancing over my shoulder to see if I were followed, half expecting, though I knew it would not be so, to perceive a civil guard in long overcoat with rifle and fixed bayonet standing at a corner watching me. No, there were none watching my vagaries, though many, on their own business intent, looked idly at my cropped head and then passed onward. Then a new sense of desolation seized me—of solitude more gruesome even than that of Dartmoor. Here people bumped against me if I loitered, unaccustomed as I was to move except by word of command. They seemed to push the wavering waif from their path as one who is idle, and purposeless, and deserves to be run over. The traffic and hurry and bustle made my head spin, and the indifference with which I was bandied to and fro caused my sinews to vibrate, my blood to tingle in an access of anger.

Is it thus you treat the outcast who has returned again? I thought, as I ground my teeth. A fresh outrage this! In a moment when he knew not what he did he was guilty of an accident for which you slew him—pitiless ones! For you did slay him more surely

than by the hangman's rope. His soul and body dead, you have set his phantom free; you permit it to hover whither the winds may drive it, among the dwellings of the living, taking no heed, save to brush away what appears an importunate mist. The phantom of the man who fell, and for whom you had no bowels of mercy till it was too late, is among ye once again, and ye shall rue the day when you relented. 'Tis but a misty veil—a cloud-wreath, if you will—which a puff of breeze should dissipate; yet shall it cling as closely as a cerecloth. The misty veil shall embrace your faces, cold and clammy like the grave-clothes of a corpse. Ye shall try to tear it aside, in vain. Impalpable and deadly, it shall do its work, hugging your skins like Medea's shirt of fire.

Then my anger would subside, for there was something withering about this busy tempest of indifference, which swept along the street so sublimely heedless of my wrath. In my loneliness I longed for the moor again, where at least it was the interest of many to know that I existed and to watch what I did. Though a mere number—Y 122—there

I was an entity. It was people's business to know that I existed, and to scrutinise me half a dozen times a day; to search my pocket, cut my hair, see that my gruel was of proper quality, my garments free from holes. If I tried to mutilate myself the whole prison would be agog; reports be sent flying to Whitehall. Here it mattered to none what should become of me. If I, distressed and bewildered by unaccustomed bustle, were swept under crushing cartwheels, who would care? I should be shunted out of the way like a discoloured leaf, and the stream would roll on without a change. If I cried out that I was homeless and starving, nobody would take notice. In prison I had but to ring my bell and complain that my bread was underweight, for it to be instantly weighed and my grievance righted. This heedless throng denied all to the wanderer, even the poor solace of complaint. Whither should I bend my steps? I began to grow weary. What was this street which appeared to be familiar? A red pillar-box at a corner. A shop where newspapers were sold. Something within, which had been slumbering for years,

gave so great a leap as to overset my equilibrium—so great a bound that I staggered and clung to the pillar-box for support. How strange that my wayward feet should have led me hither! Was this done designedly by Fate, as a lesson, a hint, a warning—what? This was the very spot where I used to loiter whilst waiting for my wife; the spot where, peering out of the Black Maria, I had last beheld my darling—my golden-haired little one, for whose sake I had sacrificed my name. How vividly the scene came back to me. Her mother standing erect and careless, my child with tears of grief on her sweet face! What had happened to those two since then? Since the devils claimed me as their own, I had dreamed less and less of Mildred. The avenger had nought to do with her; the gulf was broader, even more wide now than that awful night had made it. Betwixt her and me lay more than an ocean. She was as far from the man with the stone within his breast, as though already she occupied her place among the stars.

And yet this was a singular coincidence. Why should I have been brought to this one

spot in all the mazy immensity of London? I would like to have stooped to kiss the place where she had stood. Was it possible that . . . No! it was not. Want of food was making the wanderer light-headed. Mildred was in good health, and happy, and had long since forgotten the dead. That was well. Feeling sick and faint—unhinged—I entered a publichouse and asked for a glass of ale. The barmaid stared at me and went to consult her master. Presently he came too, and stared. Did they see I was a convict, and did they consider that my shadow polluted their threshold? No. The publican merely said that he declined to serve me, because it was evident I was half-seas over—drunk! I whose lips no fermented liquor had touched for twelve years. Drunk! The sight of that public bar filled me with a horror of what passed the last time that I had stood in one. Pewter pots, glittering and heavy. With a moan I slunk out again and went upon my way. Where was the steadfastness of purpose which had upheld me all these years? What were the devils thinking of him who aspired to join their cohorts? This

would not do ; I must pull myself together. More calmly I strode on and on, and by-and-by became master of my emotion.

It was the return into the whirl which had so upset the outcast. In a few days he would grow accustomed to the turmoil, and be himself again. Certainly, it was most important that I should enter on my new life by gradual gradations. I felt glad that it would be necessary for me to lie *perdu* for a time. By night I would prowl about for exercise, when the street was deserted and the bustle hushed, and so I should develop, like an expanding flower, into the *dilettante* victualler. Supposing that I had been asked to play the *rôle* at once, I felt that inevitably I should break down. The sight of a passing policeman on his beat would fill me with apprehension. I should be lamentably deficient in brilliant repartee, wherewith to parry the quips of witty butlers. There was another reason, too—the existence of which broke upon me little by little—why it would be well for me to vanish until I could reappear transformed. I was amazed at the number of old faces that I saw. Not old faces belonging to

friends of days gone by, but faces of men whom I had known at Pentonville or Dartmoor. I saw horsekeepers, beggars, figures arrayed like betting-men, who tipped me a sly wink as I slouched past, and I could not help reflecting what a hard thing it must be for 'gentlemen lags' to have this extra pitfall prepared by a benignant Government for their unstable feet. Another, and hitherto unnoticed result this, of the present method of herding prisoners indiscriminately together. The gentleman lag has been compelled to associate throughout his term with pick-pockets and garotters. He comes out, and his friends obtain for him a fresh chance. But as he moves about the thoroughfares of London he comes upon his old allies. He is apparently in fine feather, and they are not. He has found friends and a good place, they have no better buoy than a Prisoners' Aid Society. Is it likely that they will allow him to give them the cold shoulder. No, indeed! They will dog his steps, and cling to him, and clasp him to their bosoms, and point him out for an ex-felon, unless he shows a civil front.

Do you not remember the story of the Comte de Saint Helène, who, an escaped felon, assumed the identity of another man, grew high in court favour, commanded a regiment, and led a blameless life ; but came to be betrayed at last by a fellow convict in whose schemes he had refused to participate ? I saw many men with whom I had been on speaking terms at Dartmoor. Where did they live, these habitual depredators ? In the thieves' quarters, of course. Short's Gardens ; the labyrinths of Drury Lane ; the dens of the New Cut. Those winks and friendly nods boded no good to our scheme. If these fellow gaol-birds were to track me into the holy of holies and insist upon 'keeping company,' I, the decoy, and the band I was to lead, might whistle for our prey. The police would be down upon us in a twinkling. Sir Edmund Henderson would smile his saddened smile, in that his acumen had unveiled a new facet in the vice of the metropolis, and that he was depressed, not surprised, by his discovery. It was not only police surveillance which it would be my business to outwit, but the more dangerous

watchfulness of 'pals.' Where had Spevins settled that I was to live whilst lying *perdu*? It must be somewhere altogether removed from the haunts of thieves—some place where he and the members of the new band might call upon me without fear of detection. The more I thought this over, the more imperative it seemed to me that my comrades should cultivate prudence and weigh the pros and cons of so important a point in our *début*. But while I pondered (making the circuit of quiet squares) a church clock clanged out the hour, and I stepped out at a brisker pace, for darkness was closing in, and I had appointed to meet Jaggs upon the Surrey side.

I found that gentleman in splendid feather. Outside a coffee-shop in the Westminster Bridge Road, he stood awaiting my arrival, the admiration of all the shop-girls in the neighbourhood, for whose behoof he turned round and round, whilst pretending to be engrossed with a haberdasher's show in order to display the beauties of his back. Though no longer in his first youth, the 'man of many laggings' was presentable enough

when skilfully made up. Skilley, combined with bread-and-water, had dashed the bloom from the rose, but the rose preserves its sweetness in spite of a little battering; some indeed consider that its scent may be improved thereby. Be that as it may, there was no room for doubt that out of prison Jaggs was a dazzling creature, whose artless ways threw women off their guard. He was fitted by nature and by art for conquest—armed for the purpose *cap-à-pie*. His cheeks were still hollow and pallid and seamy; there was no help for that, as he disdained cosmetics; but his hair waved with bushy luxuriance, all the thicker for being kept down so long. He showed a predilection for ornament—a liking for jewellery and colour which was almost oriental. He wore a fashionable low-collared shirt with bright green stripes, a loose red necktie clasped by a be-jewelled ring, faultless pantaloons, a tight frock-coat with a great deal of braid on it, over which peeped the tenderest soupçon of white waistcoat—most graceful homage to the autumn warmth.

Indeed, Jaggs was overwhelmingly genteel

in manner as well as get-up ; but I detected a distinct change in him (and who should know the ins and outs of the scoundrel so well as I ?) since he submitted himself to the tutelage of Spevins. The guileless babe had found the nurse of whose non-existence he had complained, the guardian who was to defend him against temptation. Little by little he had dropped his airs of patronage, had fallen completely under the burglar's sway, had come to look on him as his director ; and, now that he was free, he was more airy and infantine than ever, gambolling as it were in the sunshine, secure in the vigilance of his ally. To look at him now you would never have supposed the graceful creature capable of associating with the vulgar wielder of a jemmy. The shiniest of hats, the daintiest of patent-leather shoes and silk stockings, the neatest of *peau de Suède* gloves, were the culminating glories of an ensemble which, looming suddenly upon the commonplace of the Westminster Bridge Road, was well calculated to ravish the female heart. Consequently the waitresses of a coffee-shop fluttered to us with one

accord, in spite of my peculiar aspect and ill-cut clothes, and brushed with vigour at antique mustard-stains — maps upon the tablecloth—as they chirpingly inquired our pleasure.

Jaggs took the initiative with a superior nonchalance which I was not prepared to combat. It was plain that I was the country cousin and he the London swell. Was not the golden pince-nez with which he masked his injured eyes (red and bleared through over-use of lime) the very crowning attribute of a real toff? The genuine article and no mistake—twenty-two carat—no relation to the base but glittering metal which hails from the ateliers of Brummagem.

He ordered bacon and eggs for two, and a brace of teas, with a haughty air of scornful tolerance which damped the spirits of the waitresses, who fairly collapsed when, upon their depositing the dish upon the table, he turned its contents over with a fork and begged that every door and window might instantly be closed.

‘Your eggs have got chickens in ’em, and will fly away,’ he remarked with biting irony ;

‘while as for your rashers—mind the draught, do—they’re so thin they’ll be blown off the plate!’

The damsels were still further harrowed by the manners of the real swell; for this particular example of the genus disdained to touch their humble forks and knives with his aristocratic skin—at any rate he forebore to take off his gloves; and what reason could he possibly have for that except supreme gentility?

The gentlemanly Jaggs had been released from duress a few weeks before me, and was no longer affected by the unaccustomed luxury of ordinary knives and forks and food not served up in tins. With me it was otherwise. The sight of that brownish rasher with a grimy bloated egg sitting on its chest, which egg had burst in the process of cooking and was shapeless, touched me more nearly than aught I had yet seen, cooing as it did of liberty. The man without a heart, who could look on his bustling fellow-men with no feeling but one of vengeance longing to be gratified, was moved to tears by the aspect of that uncomely feast; and if

his superior companion had not admonished him with kicks upon the shins, it is possible that he might have given way and sobbed outright.

He did nothing so indecorous, however. A momentary spasm, and he was himself again, and could listen calmly to Jaggs's whispered conversation. A kind gentleman, the waitresses decided, to make so free and be so familiar with that queer homely-looking fellow in the short hair.

He was wonderfully condescending truly, and went through his paces for the benefit of the admiring damsels in a way which made me smile; but at the same time he agreed with my views, and saw as I did that it was of the first importance to our scheme that I should avoid collision with old pals. Spevins, he said, had arranged a temporary shakedown for me with some friends in Whitechapel. Yet would he take on himself the responsibility of changing the programme. We would sally out forthwith and seek lodgings in the Borough as originally arranged; his company might be necessary for me, as my appearance was rather curious. But my

fashionable friend would put that all right, and then we would separate. To-morrow we might meet at Scotland Yard, as if by accident ; then I could throw out the first hint about going abroad, and report my temporary address, whilst he went up to claim some property of which a spiteful country had taken possession when it chose, in its preposterous ill-nature, to shut him up.

We met there as prearranged ; and it was lucky we did so, or I should have gone wandering round for ever, feeling shy of openly avowing myself a convict. When I appeared under the archway he gave a stage-start, and advanced with voluble greetings, holding out both hands which on this occasion were cased in yellow kid, and proceeded to do the honours of the place, in nowise abashed or dismayed by the presence of the gentlemen in blue who thronged each passage and peered over every blind.

‘Shouldn’t I like to blow up the lot with dynamite, like Guy Fawkes !’ whispered Jaggs, as he led me to a side office wherein sat an officer behind an enormous ledger. Then, in the most engaging manner, he presented me

to the official. 'Mr. Rundle—Mr. Anderson; Mr. Anderson—Mr. Rundle—charming fellows both—know each other. Never met before? Dear me! How odd—how very remarkably odd!'

The policemen on duty tittered, while Mr. Rundle looked me sternly up and down.

'Jaggs was a queer bloke—that he was,' the understrappers murmured. 'A real rum un—wasn't his brass splendid? He wouldn't be frightened even in presence of the Lord Mayor—not he! Would probably hold out a hand, and drawl out, "How do!"—or poke him in the ribs, or even slap him upon his august bow-window.'

Mr. Rundle was suspicious of my predilection for the crop, and said so as he surveyed me through his spectacles.

''Tain't natural,' he observed shortly. 'The first thing convicts think of is their hair; and they're always bothering to be allowed to grow it months and months before the time, I know. However, it's your own look-out of course. But no tricks, mind, or you'll lose your license and be sent back to where you came from. Going abroad,

eh? A wise step, as things are at present managed. Keep you from bad companions. Where did you pick up that man? Oh! here in the yard! Bad companion—couldn't be worse. Cut him!

Outside the door Jaggs was waiting for me.

'As a stranger who doesn't know the place—it really is too odd a notion!—I'd advise you to come upstairs with us. Some day you may find it necessary to know where to call. Better learn all the rigs, hadn't he, bobby? Hasn't he got anything here of his own? Nabbed at Carlisle, was he? Well—come on. Bless you, the obliging official won't mind—will you, bobby?

Jaggs's festive attire and yellow kids were not without their effect even on the callous nature of the gentleman in blue. Fine feathers do indeed make fine birds; and this bird was entertaining as well as gay of plumage; so the official elected to be benignant.

Arrived on the first floor, we were ushered by two constables through an anteroom, hung round with flashy ladies' clothes and

boots, and sealskin cloaks all full of moth—an apartment which looked haggard and untidy, up-all-nightish, like those where ‘supers’ dress in theatres, with a large chamber beyond like a bazaar. I never saw so incongruous a variety of articles as were assembled here, and stood looking about, bewildered. There were one or two mattresses, and portmanteaus and umbrellas by the score; elegant dressing-bags with silver fittings; morocco desks, surmounted by ormolu monograms; hat-boxes, bonnet-boxes, bundles of rugs, bunches of keys, fans, books done up in straps for travelling; even luncheon-baskets and carriage-lamps. And all these things belonged to convicts now under sentence! How many, then, must have been captured just as they were making off, starting by a night express perchance, or about to step on board a boat; almost out of danger, poor wretches! All the articles were neatly labelled, piled in racks from floor to ceiling, like winebottles in a bin. Then there were stuffed birds, photograph-books, every conceivable thing that a man or woman could by any possibility have been carrying at the

time he or she was taken. The clothes worn by criminals are confiscated, and new suits provided by the state ; but portable effects are drafted to Scotland Yard, where they may be claimed by the convict on his release.

‘ Is the whole house stacked like this ? ’ I asked in surprise, thinking how queer it would be if burglars were to break into it, for a change, and steal their fellow-scoundrels’ property.

‘ No,’ a policeman answered, who was searching for Jaggs’s effects; ‘ upstairs is the Black Museum, where the objects are kept that have been used as evidence in murders—a cheerful lot of playthings. There’s a baby’s bottle there containing laudanum and milk, dozens of bloody razors, pistols, jemmies—instruments you gentry know more about, I daresay, than I do. Drat those things of yours, Mr. Jaggs ! I can’t make out where they’ve been stored. What was it—a dressing-case, you say, in polished walnut ? You’d better call again.’

But Jaggs loftily refused to be put off in that way ; so long as he was free, the bobby would be good enough to remember that he

was a gentleman. His time was too precious, he declared, to be spent in dancing attendance upon the police. 'You're paid to do your work, I suppose, and well too, or else you'd strike. I can't encourage laziness ; it's against my principles—so I don't budge from here till I get my things. Mr. Anderson is a stranger here—I can't really get over the funniness of that. Show us the safe where all the gold watches and chains are. How many might there be now ?'

My companion looked persuasively innocent, but the policeman shook his head, and closed one eye with deliberation. 'What, again ?' he inquired, grinning. 'You've a watch and chain among 'em, I suppose. The best of the lot, in course. Oh yes, in course you have ! We've good cause to remember the dance you once led us, Mr. Jaggs.'

The artless one was flattered to discover that the barbs which he had flung had stuck. It is encouraging to find your deeds of prowess treasured in the memory of your natural foe. Jumping up on to a port-

manteau and complacently examining his stockings as he swung his legs, he observed, turning to me : ‘ Now look at this fellow ! He dares to take away my character in order to screen himself. It’s the way of the world. The virtuous go to the wall, and the wicked triumph ; and they call these persons officers of justice ! What does he refer to ? Only a little mistake they made here once, and tried to make me the sufferer. But though when sent to quod I’m as quiet as a lamb, I’m not to be tryannised over or put upon—when out.’

‘ You’re wonderful chaps for insisting on your rights, you convicts,’ agreed the policeman.

‘ Of course we are ; but don’t you call me a convict when I’m in mufti. This is how it happened. Somewhere about my first or second stretch it was, as far as I recollect ; and a great shame too, for I was just off to Paris on a spree, and they might have arrested me quite as well when I came back. But they had an eye to the swag, these officers of justice, for I was togged up first-rate for the occasion. Kicksies, built hanky-

panky to drop down over the trotters, with double fakement down the sides ; and a downy upper benjamin, cut in saucy style—slap—a brand-new suit from the first London tailor, I regret to tell you—for my cruel country stole it. And then I happened to be figged out in lots of jewellery. Diamond studs, rings, watch and chain, and a breast-pin set with sapphires. All of the best, upon my honour——’

‘Sham !’ muttered the unbelieving and laconic constable.

‘Real. Go on !’ retorted Jaggs with indignation, for this was touching him upon his weakest point ‘Do you think I’d not be ashamed to be seen with sham jewellery? Well, when I came out I claimed the lot, of course, and they couldn’t find it—swore the things were not worth keeping, and had been thrown away ; and wanted to put me off like that. But I knew better—the careless vagabonds ! Didn’t I know they’d waited to take me till I was toggged out, in order that they might rob me of my things—the black-guards !’

‘Made us furnish you with a full set, all complete, diamonds and sapphires and all,’ laughed the constable, with a kind of admiration. ‘You had us that time, you scamp ! but since then we’ve been more careful, and keep everything, however useless. Yes ; you did sell us neatly, I confess. But never no more. Look at that old gridiron up there : what’s it worth ? nothing. It’s wore out, and would fall to pieces if you put it on the fire. Do you suppose the owner of that would take a new one if we offered it ? certainly not. He’ll have that identical article when he comes out, or there’ll be as much rumpus as if the place was burning. You are a peculiar breed, you are. Come ! here’s your dressing-case at last. Sign the receipt now, and be off, or you’ll be fingering something of somebody else’s, and getting us into more trouble.’

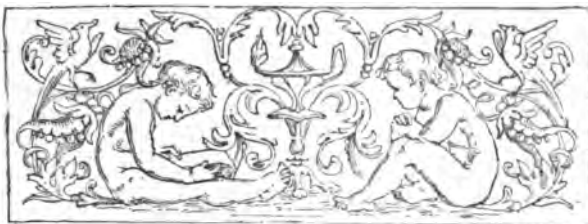
Arrived in the yard below, Jaggs made an elaborate display of taking an affectionate leave of me for ever, and of wishing me, in a voice broken by emotion, a prosperous career. Then he hailed a hansom, kissed his yellow kids to Mr. Rundle, who out of his

den was watching his proceedings with a frown, and rattled off.

The officer emerged, as I was moving away, to bestow a parting caution. 'Go abroad,' he said, 'by all means, if you can command money or influence. It's the wisest move. I only wish we could send 'em all abroad, before they're tempted, and come in for a second sentence. Behave well now, and let us know before you start; and meanwhile avoid such scamps as that one who's just gone.'

I turned slowly towards the Borough. By reversing the original decree, the authorities had shown that they considered me hardly treated; and yet they supposed that I would tamely put up with their injustice. Go abroad, forsooth! No; I longed to be at work. It was tiresome to have to wait; but it was for the best. In six months or so we would begin. What were six months to a man who for years had curbed his passions for a settled and deliberate purpose; who had played his arduous part without once blenching or allowing an eyelid to quiver? But as we near our goal we grow impatient.

A fortnight *en évidence*. Then a few months concealed ; and then I would enter on the office to which I was predoomed by circumstance.



CHAPTER II.

RETIREMENT.



HE fortnight passed, and I decamped. My modest lodging had been on a first floor, over a wholesale boot-shop ; and, laying myself out for observation on the score of eccentricity, I had made it my habit to sit on the tiny balcony with a glass balanced on my knee, snipping my short hair with a pair of scissors. The people opposite watched me ; the policeman on his stately march turned to stare at me ; the little boys ceased their eternal whistling for a moment to whoop and jeer at me. I was supposed by all to be a lunatic, let out too soon ; until the constable, conversing with the slavey as she

waited for her ha'porth of milk, whispered the truth. A felon out on license ! Both slavey and landlord breathed more freely when I placed my small belongings in a cab, and ordered the driver to speed quickly to the docks.

On the map of London there is a tiny district—between Tower Hill and Wapping—which may be covered by the little finger-tip. In years now happily gone by it was a species of *Alsatia*—a safe refuge for the scum of the earth, into which no emissaries of the law dared venture. Even now it is a festering labyrinth of hideous dens where degraded beings herd like beasts, forlorn and neglected by all save a handful of poor priests—too cowed by the scourge of penury to be dangerous, too deeply sunk in the slough of misery to do aught but endure and die. There is a degree of wretchedness beyond that which goads a man to theft. He sees women and children dying of sheer starvation to the right and left, and comes by some strange method of induction to consider it a natural ending. Such men become dogged and silent, and accept their fate, burrowing

away into the extremest crevice of their holes to hide their misery, if it may be, even from the light of day. The police interfere little with this colony, for the thief-class shuns its neighbourhood. It is not cheerful to see those about you pining slowly into shadows; to hear nothing but groans; to be awakened up of nights by the throat-rattle of the moribund. The professional thief prefers the comfort and gay companionship of penny lodging-houses in streets where a cry of 'Rouse!' will, in a moment of danger, bring dozens of mates to his rescue. So the denizens of the slums round Tower Hill are left to their sorrows and their small knot of ghostly comforters, too deeply afflicted to take arms against the sea of troubles; too crushed to make a raid upon the rich.

The more weakly of these people live (such living!) by making sacks for the docks hard by, earning the large sum of sevenpence for the sewing of five-and-twenty sacks—about twelve hours of the hardest labour. The strong men—for the most part Irish—get employment when they can as dock labourers; but their calling is as overstocked

as are the liberal professions. Once 'down,' other hands step into their places, and convalescence brings a hopeless struggle after work that exists not—a tussle which breaks down their returning health—grinds them with merciful speed into their graves.

In this delectable neighbourhood Spevins decided that I should conceal myself. 'First chop!' he said, as I met him by appointment in Wapping High Street, and he gave my hand a friendly shake. 'It's first chop for a chap as 'as to lie quiet for a bit; you'll be safer there from any worriting than at the Antipodes. If the priests bother, you've only got to say that you're a Protestant, or a Bapty, or a Mahometan, or some such thing, and they'll leave you alone. I wont say as it's a jovial place—wuss a jolly sight, I will confess, than that hotel we've come from. But there are some nigger serenaders that live there, real cheerful chaps who'll keep up yer sperits, and besides, I'll be down here as often as is prudent, so you shan't mope.'

Spevins, like Jaggs, had burst into the butterfly form; but the glory of the former

was of the less dazzling kind. He affected tight corduroys, a velvet jacket with huge baggy pockets and mother-of-pearl buttons, and a furry cap set jauntily on the side of a head which streamed with hair-oil. His appearance suggested that of a gamekeeper out of place; or of one whose mother was a dairymaid, whose father was a London horse-coper. He was in immense good humour, and rattled away as we walked along, looking up at me now and again with dancing beady eyes, and that wonderful smile of his which was an atonement for many peccadilloes. Everything was going on first rate, he said. His pals were charmed with the great idea, and had already spotted a place which would be exactly suitable for the house of entertainment. The whole thing was as plain as the nose on your face. A bargain had already been struck as to the foundation of a firm, and the relative proportion of shares. The friend of whom he had spoken to me was to advance the money—the friend who like him had ‘taken the odds’—had cut the pack and turned up trumps, and had then retired on the proceeds of twenty years of villainy and un-

chequered luck into the respectability of a country mansion. This friend had objected at first, declaring that when he was made J.P. he had blotted away the past ; but upon being pressed and twitted with deserting an old but less fortunate pal, had given way at last, remarking that after all there was no reason against his taking a public-house. If baronets may make fortunes out of beer without a blush, why should not a country gentleman take a share in the profit of its sale ? So the sinews of war were handy, the centre of operations decided on ; it remained only for me to learn my part. A few months of retreat, and I was to arrive on the scene of action—a large and respectable-looking house at the corner of a mews, and of a modest thoroughfare which communicated with Curzon Street, Hertford Street, and Park Lane by a series of convenient turnings. The very thing. I was to be lavish in the way of decorations, and see that details were carried out according to my artistic instincts. Would my taste suggest anything particular, which was novel and slap-up ? We had already discussed all that, and my mind

was pretty clear upon the subject. The bar was to be decorated after the manner of a Parisian café, with mirrors and wreaths of flowers. There was to be a separate entrance and a separate sitting-room for butlers and grooms of the chamber, which was to be done up in chaste and retiring colours; while the footmen's room would be more lively; decorated with delicate tones of red and green, such as should act cheerfully upon their less-cultured intellects, and dispose their tongues to chatter. I was, in my own person, too, to resume the artist in an amateur sort of way; to produce sketches and invite the criticisms of those butlers whose masters were æsthetic—to chat with them of Cimabue, and wrangle with them upon questions of art—in course of time was to invite myself to view their masters' mansions when 'the family' had gone out to dinner.

Spevins was enraptured at the prospect! Why, in this way I could draw plans for him; could observe any peculiarities of bolt, or bar, or window-sash; and, in the interests of art, would turn my attention to what was most valuable, and note precisely where it

was kept. How splendid ! What a sparkling future was dawning for us all ! The position of the trap was as convenient as possible. Decorate it how I would, it was bound to be a servants' house of call, into which gentlemen would never drift ; for did not its better-half look down a by-street, while the other was in a mews, retired from the stream of traffic ? As we talked, the eyes of Spevins sparkled with admiration. ' You are an awful clever bloke,' he admitted with a humility strangely mixed with patronage ; ' and it was a lucky day for some of us when you chose to take up with a common lad like me. Howsomed-ever, you'll not regret it, for I'll stick to you like wax through thick and thin—for you're a real good sort—till we two can retire and become J.P.s. This is an awful dismal place I've found for you,' he proceeded, ' but it's for the best, if you only can be patient and manage to put up with it. I've got an idea of summat that might amuse you in your solitude, if you don't think I'm too bold in making suggestions to such a clever bloke.' Perceiving, by a quick glance askance, that I did not resent the liberty, he went on in

confidential tones : ' I've seen the Reverend Tilgoe about. His book's made for him no end of friends, who are indignant at the shocking way he's been treated in prison. Ain't he cunning too ! They want him to go out to South Africa as a missionary ; but that's not in his line, you may take your oath. Worse than the hotel, wouldn't it be ? His book's paid well, so he's in collar, and will set up as a littery krakter, and be buried in Westminster Abbey, I shouldn't wonder. But in the meanwhile his life's all skittles. There are boards about announcing that "(D.V.) a converted convict will preach, and snatch brands from the burning," and all that old fake. We've 'ad converted railway-porters, and converted prize-fighters and navvies, and what not ; but a convict'll be a new sensation, specially one as can yelp like anything. It's a pity he can't appear in the beautiful mustard suit as per prison-photo ! He's made hisself quite at home in a lot of wealthy families. It's queer, ain't it, that when old ladies turn pious they lose their common sense ? Oh no ; you needn't grin, for I don't grudge him his buttered toast.

The life must be fearful 'ard work, and an awful noosance such as the likes of me couldn't stand, who go in for a crust and freedom. And much as I hate his sliminess, I am bound to confess that we owe 'im one for having a good dig at the villains as locked us up. "47 Party, sir, all krect!" I wake up with a jump in the night sometimes, and seem to hear 'em singing of it out as if they enjoyed it; and it rings in my 'ed for days. Oh, bless your soul, no! I don't grudge the parson his little tit-bits that he's earned by his own unaided talent; nor yet do I grudge t'other convicts their earnings, as 'ave also come out in the littery line; but they've none of 'em done as well as they might. I think a clever bloke as 'as more book-learning than all the lot spliced together might go a deal further without fear of being disbelieved.' (Here Spevins inserted a finger between my ribs.) 'Lawk a mercy, if I only was littery! Wouldn't I pile it up hot for them warders—sarcy brutes! Ye see, people being so inclined to take things for granted makes it so werry simple. This ere Tilgoe, now, allows that every warder ain't of neces-

sity a scamp. Do you think I'd admit that? The tyrants; don't they one and all ring their blooming bells as reg'lar as clock-work, and distract a poor chap about the foldin' of his bed-clothes till he gets that frantic he'd like to cut his throat? Since I've bin out I've never made my bed—no, nor let no one else make it neither. I kicks the blankets on the floor, and they lie there till I want 'em. Those warders ain't got it half hot enough, nor the governors neither; while as for the doctors, I'd say lots of things. I'd admit nothing good of 'em—not a scrap—I'd rather die first. Why shouldn't you go in for a whack at the whole bunch?

But I shook my head, for I aspired to a loftier flight. Where he was leading me I might be dull, but any dulness was better than such a task. 'No!' I replied shortly; 'such small deer as prison-officials we'll leave to Tilgoe and men like him. The people who make laws are those I aim at. Legislators who glibly settle a knotty point without considering sufficiently its working; who, when forced to look at what they've done, hold up their hands and cry, "Who'd have thought it!" Those are the

people whose homes I would make miserable—in whose households I would sow distrust. I'd touch those on the raw by disturbing their luxuriance and comfort, for it's the only revenge open to men situated as we are. Lead on, Spevins! are we not near the place? We seem to have traversed miles of filth! Are you taking me to Hades through the bowels of the earth?

To what an appalling eyrie was he conducting me. We had passed down Rosemary Lane some minutes since, and had plunged into a mazy series of stifling courts, repulsive to sight and smell, where greasy ooze and heaps of putrefying offal set our feet sliding, while a mucous greenness trickling down the walls chilled our marrow, and caused every bit of woodwork (though we were in warm September) to feel cold and clammy. Had we not reached the bourne—not yet? Sure, nothing could be more remote from the busy hum than this. Through a doorway, from which the door had crumbled, I looked on a man dying, as it were, in public; while two shivering half-naked infants sat staring and shuddering hard by. A woman—I suppose it was a woman, though apparently

a mere huddled heap of rags—crouched by a crazy table, sewing, sewing, for dear life, with an all-absorbing frenzy which set me dreaming.

‘Isn’t it sad, Spevins,’ I mused aloud, ‘that the history of the world should be a record of struggles after food, and that even the goal of that low ambition should in so many cases be unattainable! That man is on the threshold, and will soon have passed. Those children, so livid and so hollow-eyed, are passing—passing. Foolish woman, they are doomed! why struggle any more? What good can come of it? Surely you would not desire to retain them here? Toss away the sack, abandon the unequal contest. Gathering up your rags, poor mother, lie you down and wait beside him and his who are moving out of sight.’ A few short hours—of hard tussle maybe, but yet, short hours, and the end will come—the blessed end whose bourne is peace. Why wage a disastrous war with the inevitable?’

But Spevins looked serious and said nothing; he held views which coincided in no way with my rhapsodies. He disapproved of what he saw, because he considered it man’s privilege to put in proper order nature’s slop-

work ; and the slopwork that was stored in these dismal alleys showed dropped stitches and lamentable rents.

Still onward, deeper and deeper, into that slough of misery and want we delved, until it seemed as though the mire would rise and swallow us. We groped among ghostly wooden outhouses that glinted through heavy gloom in slanting lines, as if refusing to stand longer on their crippled feet. Would it not be well, they seemed to whisper, if we were straightway to tumble down and bury this shameful spot ? Through low-browed intricate passages we wandered, which united a series of festering courts as beads are strung upon a string ; under a cumbersome arch, with a roar of railway-traffic overhead. How typical is this horrible place, I reflected, of our great Babylon ! The wealthy, the powerful, pass daily over it, humming blithe airs as they skim on merrily in their indifference. Starvation stalks abroad, unchecked, straight down below as they whirl along the rails, within a yard or two of their sumptuous garments. They raise listless eyes from the pages of a novel as they pass over the sea of

chimney-stacks which to them say nothing, and with leisurely movement pack the book away ! 'Yes ! this is London at last,' one murmurs, while another straps up the rugs. 'A dingy place, but the jolliest in Europe for those who can only afford one house. So charming, you know. For there's every style of life, and all sorts and kinds of people from which to pick and choose. We shall get to the station directly. I do hope John has ordered a good dinner !' In depth of winter they fail to note that rows and rows of chimney-stacks are smokeless. And what if they are ? 'tis no business of theirs ! Every style of life, indeed ; and every sort and kind of people—varied society enough, though to some amongst the dwellers in the great city there is given little choice.

Presently we debouched into a long narrow court, sloppy and wet by reason of broken drains, unsafe with hoary orange-peel and sweltering cabbage remnants. An anxious woman moved hastily towards us, striving to peer through the darkness ; and sighing at sight of strangers, prepared to withdraw.

'We had not seen the nigger serenaders ? Ah, well ! they must have had bad luck, or they

would have been home ere this. Unless they had fared better to-day than yesterday, the family must go supperless to bed. It is a hard life for them,' she sighed, 'especially the younger ones, who have sought in vain for other work; but the brand of their Bohemian life has marked them down, and they can procure none.' The woman went languidly in doors, and Spevins looked after her in doubt.

'I'm all for people doing what suits 'em best,' he whispered, 'but this lemancholy way of going on puts me out of temper. Didn't I explain once afore to you my views? Of course I did, and you agreed. Why should these stupid creatures starve when others roll in affluence?—that's what strikes me about 'em. If by a mistake of natur they've bin overlooked in the distribution of good things, they must up and help themselves. Surelie that's plain enough; and if all the starving people came round to that opinion, and acted on it right away, the rich uns wouldn't look so sleepy as they drive round the Park; for they'd have to do summat frisky, lest they should find their pockets with nothing in 'em! I've no patience with these creaturs, I

haven't indeed ; they deserve their fate for being so mean-spirited."

We had reached the bourne at last—Black Jack Alley. Climbing up a dilapidated stair, we found ourselves on a rickety landing, and, in trying to feel our way, our heads came in contact with a rafter, and we fell headlong against a door, which, yielding, deposited us in a low room, where a tallow candle was burning in a bottle. We would have begged pardon and retired, but the feet of both were riveted to the spot by the aspect of that sad interior.

'Don't come in here!' an old woman croaked in a hollow voice, as, holding her gaunt arms aloft, she strove to screen her home from us. 'What d'ye want, bothering wretched folk? If ye want aught, I can come outside.'

There was no furniture of any kind, nor sign of food nor scrap of clothing in that gruesome chamber. On a foul heap of straw in one corner, the wreck of a fine young man of thirty wrestled with disease. A middle-aged female was working at a sack. One end of it was hooked on a nail in the wall,

and she held the other and worked her needle swiftly, helped by an excessively unclean old man. Many more sacks were heaped about the floor, and her fingers moved with the benumbed, monotonous, and dreamlike motion of utter hopelessness. The very action of her arms was a dogged protest against the life she led. Each of her elbows seemed to say, in answer to my own thought a moment since, 'Yes, I'm a fool to work, I grant you, and yet I cannot help it. Better, I know, to give it up and lie down and wait; for never can I win enough to keep the death-wolf from the door!'

A brawny young fellow leaned against a wall, one hand deep in his pocket, the other supporting an empty pipe, at which he mechanically gnawed. His hands were black, so was his face, which otherwise would not have been uncomely. They were all thick with grime together—walls and floor and inmates—and the attention of all was concentrated, with the interest of close fellowship in misfortune, upon the writhing figure in the corner.

The brawny young man glanced up, and,

seeing sympathy on the good-natured lineaments of my companion, muttered half to us, half to himself, between his teeth, as he pointed with his pipe :

‘ You wouldn’t think it now ! but six weeks ago, he, lying there, was as hale and well as I. He’s a coalheaver, like me, and we earned our money honest ; and look at the poor creature, do ! S’pose it’ll be my turn next.’

We looked down, and surveyed a human being squatting on a foetid layer of filth, with nothing but an inch or two of rottenness ’twixt his body and the floor. Pillow he had absolutely none, but supported himself by clinging with cramped hands to the angles and excrescences of the panelling.

‘ He looks very ill !’ I said unconsciously.

‘ Ill,’ echoed the younger woman, flinging down her sack, and seizing the man, with a laugh, by the hair, to turn his cadaverous face to us. ‘ Ill ! Look up and show your beauty to these strangers. I don’t know what they want prying here ; but, if they enjoy it, they may look and welcome !’

Thus admonished, the man turned his features to us, which were pallid with the grey

hue of death, while his eyes were dim with the leaden glaze of approaching dissolution.

‘He’s dying,’ I said coldly. ‘Why should I pity him for that?’

‘Yes, he is!’ retorted the woman. ‘You don’t care, do you? Of course not; then why not let us be? What’s he dying of? Want — starvation — that’s his complaint. Now will ye be satisfied, and get ye gone?’

She glared fiercely from the corner where she crouched, and I strove to draw my companion away. The man was wasting literally for lack of a crust of bread. Well! Not a pleasant method, I daresay, of escaping from an unjust world. But, after all, escape is the main point, and to achieve it we will go through much. In crawling through the window at Dartmoor, Soda had scraped the skin from off his back, but he reckoned his skin as of less value than his liberty. This coalheaver was on the threshold, like dozens, perhaps, in this colony; another gasp or two, and he too would be at liberty. No! I could not find it within me to pity him. Pity had long ago been seared out of my breast. I had prayed in vain so often] that

the Pilgrim might unveil and set me free, that I had ceased to consider Death in any form as anything but Release. In my own case the craving was past for the present, for I was absorbed by an engrossing object. I did not pity these people, but I did feel that we had no right to intrude upon the sacredness of their trouble.

But Spevins would not go. He was kneeling on the floor beside the man.

‘What’s this ? A bad knee ?’ he inquired.

The dying man smiled, and whispered :

‘An old hurt ! A doctor saw it, and prescribed linseed poultices. I was to buy food for my knee while my stomach remains empty ! One thing or t’other, that’s all I care about. I wouldn’t mind if I could get well again ; but it’s a sore thing to see ’em wearing out their strength for one who’ll never do any more good ;’ and he traced listless patterns on the wall with ashen fingers, and fell back fatigued and panting, cramped and crippled, in the angle of the wainscoting.

‘Now look ye here !’ Spevins exclaimed, genuinely touched. ‘I’m a poor devil myself, as ’as bin dreadful unfortnit’, and that makes

me p'r'aps sorry for you, while I despise you. If I was a rich cove, I could afford to do all the despising without the sorrow. When I'm unfortnait', it ain't for want of trying ; but if the odds will go agin me, what am I to do ? Howsomever, they're on the turn now, and I should 'ave bad luck sartin sure if I were to go away and leave you to die like a dog ; so you may put it down to selfishness, and feel no obligation. 'Ere's half-a-dollar anyhow. Somebody go and buy the poor mean-sperited creetur' summat, while somebody else shows this 'ere gen'leman up to his apartment.'

The effect of the burglar's brief harangue was greater than could have attended the most highly-polished eloquence. Unused to kindness, and save, perhaps, a passing word of sympathy from one in a like condition, the elder woman stared stupidly at the coin, without a word of thanks, as she held it in hungry talons, while the other sank with sobs on the labouring breast of the moribund. The young coalheaver withdrew the empty pipe from between his teeth, and muttered :

'God bless you ! but it comes too late.

Thank ye kindly though, all the same.' Then rousing himself to look at the new lodger, he added : ' So this is the party as is a-going to live where old Flintoff croaked ? It's on the floor above ; I'll show you.' And brushing the back of his dusky hand across his face to wipe away a tear, he took the bottle with the candle in it, and led the way.

A peal of laughter from below startled me.

Good heavens ! I thought, what has laughter to do in Black Jack Alley ? Light-heartedness seems inextinguishable in some people. Laughter at Dartmoor is comprehensible enough, for its inmates have no immediate cares beyond their tale of labour. Like the lilies of the field, they have no thought for the morrow, what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or what they shall put on. But could these wretches here afford to laugh, standing as they do on the brink of the same chasm which is swallowing up all their neighbours ? Yet perhaps this merriment savours more of callousness than mirth, more of bravado than of heart's ease.

' Those are the serenaders,' explained our

guide, who was looking me up and down with stealthy surprise. 'They've been lucky to-day, I suppose, so they're jolly. I'm glad of it, for they're honest chaps, and their lives are precious hard !'

How these starving creatures prated of honesty ! What was this one staring at ? The quaint idea flitted across my mind that, peradventure, they who were starving would ostracise me as a gaol-bird !

Was, then, my appearance so very odd ? Was the prison odour perceptible even to this fellow ? Was it to be like Jaggs and the paupers in the workhouse ? Some such notion occurred, too, to Spevins, who showed misgivings, and began to mumble apologies for his inconsistent conduct just now.

'I can't comprehend these coves,' he whispered, 'who've got empty stommicks and idle arms that hang down like bell-pulls. If they prefer to perish of starvation, I've no call to interfere, but I couldn't help giving that half-dollar. We only feel contempt, of course, for anything so helpless ; and yet it's 'ard to see a fellow-creetur' miserable when ye can prevent it. Besides, that half-dollar was in payment

for what's worth havin'. It's the sight of this kind of brooding misery that makes me quite easy-like in my conscience as to my line of business. When I makes an unseasonable call, and walk off with a swell's valuables while he's a-snorin' on his feather-bed upstairs, I says to myself, "Parsons who preach say that what I'm a-doin' is verry wrong, but it ain't nuffin of the kind. It's all right, my rosy cove," I says; "you'll be vexed to lose your valuables, but I'm only servin' you out for never thinking of anybody but yourself. The rich blokes as are so cool and careless as to let such things as this go on comfortably at their elbow, have got to be made to suffer for it. They've got to have so many strokes with the cat. It ain't my fault, is it, if I happen to be the cat, and chance to do myself a good turn at the same time? Besides, when I makes a good haul, the helpless coves as can't feed themselves come in for their share of spoon-meat. It's my way of paying taxes. I always was charitable to the very poor, though they're wrong not to be more independent-like; and yet perhaps that's their misfortun', as it is when a chap goes off

his nut; and when a chap's off his nut, he ain't responsible for his foolish acts.'

The coalheaver was some way in front of us, so my companion's peculiar opinions did not reach his ears. Neither did he hear him say :

'Since you've got to live here, it's as well to be friendly. Whatever is he starin' at so hard ?'

Up the stair we stumbled somehow—a straight stair like a ladder, with a step or two missing, and several others on the point of giving way; and on the second-floor we found my room.

'This is the place, I suppose,' the young coalheaver remarked, snuffing the wick with his fingers that we might take in the beauties of the premises. 'Leastways, it's the only room that's free. You see, if we don't pay no rent, nobody bothers to turn us out. Flintoff lived here. This is his furniture. Not very spicy, but better than ourn below. He didn't need to pop his chairs and tables, for he was a miser as used to go begging; and we found two hundred pounds in sovereigns and silver sewn into his mattress,

when mother, whom you saw downstairs, came up to wash the body.'

'You did!' ejaculated Spevins; 'and what did you do with it?'

'He left no heirs and had no friends, so it went to the Queen, I've heard say.'

Spevins gave a long whistle, and scratched his head in ever-increasing scorn.

'And you let it go to *her*!' he cried at length, in a tone of withering contempt.

'It wasn't ourn,' responded the other with hauteur; then turning to me as though the subject were displeasing, he said: 'You'll excuse me, but you look a better sort than most who come to live here; I mean you've got good clothes and that. Of course it's not my business to know your circumstances, but if you should want anything done, don't forget me. I'm willing enough, God knows; but I'm out of work and out of collar, through no fault of mine, and likely to remain so. Good-night, and thank ye kindly for my poor mate.'

And so he left us, and Spevins sighed mournfully as he listened to his blundering steps upon the creaking stair.

‘Well, that’s woful!’ he remarked presently, with professional regret. ‘A great stalwart fellow like that to say he’s out of work, and there are cribs I’ve got my eye on that are waiting to be cracked. Literally yawning and yearning for it, they are! Didn’t somebody say that Heaven will help him as helps hisself? Well, well! it’s discouraging to see men waste their opportunities. We’re going to help ourselves by-and-by, ain’t we? I thought for a minute that he spotted your hair, and that there might be unpleasantness. These chaps are so ignorant and stoopid, and have such queer ideas. But it’s all serene. He thinks you too distingy for the likes o’ him, that’s all; and he’s right enough there, my gentleman lag, ain’t he?’

Here Mr. Spevins went through an excruciating performance of holding his breath and driving gimlets into his lips to prevent anything issuing thence, till he grew scarlet in the face, and threatened to have a fit. But his jocularity was short-lived. The brawny coalheaver stuck in his throat; and resuming his original colour by degrees, he declared

that what vexed him most about nature's slopwork was the quantity of wasted material in it. 'You see it everywhere,' he said, 'from the lardy-dardy young nobs, who say they're soldiers, and pretend to be exhausted by half an hour's ride in a tin hat, down to fellars like this one who's too imbecile—as the others are too idle—to use the powers he's been given. The lardy young nobs would make good enough food for powder—I grant they're not fit for much else, being empty-pated—if they were shaken up and sent off to do soldiers' work, instead of taking exhausting rides about London in tin hats and dish-covers; and in the same way, first-rate cracksmen might be made out of this sort, if they only had the gumption. Look at his arms! And what a chest! How he would wield a bar! But it's gumption that's wanted, that's what it is. The general distribution of good things was awfully mismanaged. Some had all the wealth, and some had none; some had health, and some had none; while as to gumption, it was worse than all. Not one in a hundred had a drop of it; though gumption was invented to help to put

crooked things straight. Now I've gumption, as my life has shown, though I did fetch one lagging, and know better now than to fetch another. And you've gumption, haven't you? Oh, tweezers!

Here Mr. Spevins, overcome with an excess of appreciation, danced a war-dance round me, with a snapping of fingers and steps of heel and toe which fairly shook the tenement, then subsided panting on a stool, while he watched his prize out of the corner of one glittering and appreciative eye, as a robin does when you throw it a crumb of bread.

'Yes, *we've* gumption,' he ecstatically cried, 'lots of it—more nor our share. And we'll turn up trumps—that's to say J.P.s—you'll see! There now! We never know what's good for us. When I was nabbed I did feel shocking cross. Ain't it too bad, I grumbled, to have been left out in the distribution, and then to be whipped up for attempting to put things square? But I was wrong, and I'm sorry now I was cross. For though I'd laid an egg, I couldn't have hatched it without the help of such a hen as

you to sit on it ; and where could I hope to come in contact with a upper-class bloke like you except at the Hotel ? There's the good of the Hotel, and I'm not ungrateful. It throws all sorts together, and out of the jumble queer results arise. Out in the open sea queer bits of wood drift together—bits of American mahogany and bits of English deal ; queer friendships are formed in quod, which could never otherwise exist. I'm grateful for its hospitality once, but never no more—no thank you ; I've learnt all I wished to learn, formed all the friendships I wanted to form. And now, cheer up, old pal ! I'll be down here as often as it's prudent. Be cautious, and keep up your pecker, and good-night !'



CHAPTER III.

BROODING.



HE time I spent in Black Jack Alley did not tend to reconcile me to the world. It seemed to me that I must be doing my 'separates' again, or that in consequence of many breaches of discipline and the discovery of the famous plot, I had been condemned to 'Second probation.' And if I had, could it have been worse than this? No! nor half as bad. I had seen men undergoing 'Second probation' when I was at Pentonville; men who, too wicked even for 57 Party, had been returned to a close prison for close confinement. Proved to be too unruly for association upon public works, men of this description are locked up alone; but then they are looked after with

no less care than formerly. Their clothes are no less good, nor is their food. Their cells are not less well warmed ; their supply of books is not diminished. And how did I stand ? Day after day I sat alone by the crazy table of the defunct miser, conning a book or lost in reverie, more apart from my fellow-men than if I had been in prison. Thanks to Spevins I had money enough for my meagre wants, and by his desire—strange whimsy !—deposited a shilling on every second day upon the floor of the room below. Spite of all that could be done the young man died. Rolled in a tattered sheet he was whisked down the narrow stair, flung into a pauper's shell upon a barrow, and trundled off—who cared whither ? His women-folk accepted their loss with a resignation which looked like indifference. The serenaders remarked that one breather the less in the little room, would make it more wholesome for the rest. This was his requiem. The sackmakers had one less mouth to try and feed. Yet what could that signify, considering how unsuccessful were their efforts ? I thought, and thought, and thought, and

reviewed the piled-up injuries of the last twelve years, and listened to curious sounds, framing a story for each ; an occasional outcry, a shriek now and then ; frequently a noise of quarrelling which ended in a bang, a thud, and then silence. Now and again a song crooned to a baby ; and this jarred most upon my nerves, where everything was distressing. I thought much of Spevins—that strange paradox. Gaily, for sake of gain, he was preparing to dress himself like Nemesis. Goaded by a filmy vision of some day being enthroned as a J.P., and of administering justice to others, instead of himself standing in the dock, he was smilingly ready to lead as many domestic servants as possible to their ruin, to spread dismay and distrust into the bosoms of hundreds of families, by adroit use of the gumption whereby crooked things were to be set straight. And yet the spectacle of a young man dying of starvation was too much for him. He could make grateful pensioners of that youth's belongings, and be harassingly particular as to the payment of the pension ! How much more rational was my position ! I had

the best of reasons for making of myself a scourge—the central, most knotted thong of it. But I felt no feeling for these besotted persons, only contempt for their abjectness in refraining from giving tit for tat. Whether right in my theories or not, I was consistent. Time was when I too had crouched and groaned, but I knew better now. Is our manhood to count for nothing? has it no dignity? Are we not to resent injustice? As I thought of it, my life, which had been broken in a moment of unconscious error, rose like a many-headed hydra, and mowed at me, and hissed out of its myriad mouths: ‘You’re right! If you are smitten, smite again in turn; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! Who prates of the other cheek? Do not crouch and groan, but gird up your loins and strike without considering what may result.’

If such over-prudent considerations might obtain, where would the golden garlands be which adorn the galleries of Walhalla—garlands whose flowers sprang from the life-blood of heroes, who flung away their lives for an idea? My life, save for one purpose,

was valueless, for it had no future. My lance was splintered ere the fight commenced; yet would I grasp the shivered shaft and smite mine enemy a vengeful blow in the back. He would turn and bear me down; what mattered that? My wound would be there, my weapon would be sticking between his shoulder-blades. What mattered if he slew me afterwards? I should have entered my protest, have done my best in the way of vengeance against an enemy stronger than myself, and no man may do more. I cared not for the vulgar advantages which sent Spevins to the seventh heaven. When Spevins should retire on his wealth, was I prepared to do likewise? No! If vengeance could be complete, then would my task be done; but it would never be complete. He should have the wealth, and welcome—I, the revenge. If I might live through a long life—and now I nursed myself like a hypochondriac, and husbanded my health—it should be but for one object. That Society, whose ban had crushed me, should, so long as my life endured, writhe in a bed of scorpions.

What more dreadful than an unseen, implacable foe? An unseen hand should constantly disturb its rest, an unseen finger direct invisible cohorts, whose shadowy columns should be an eternal nightmare. All my skill, all my pent-up venom, should be directed to the great object. What if in the end the mask should be torn away? What if the master-spirit, who in time was to drill all criminal London into a compact body, were some day to be betrayed and captured? Well, what of that? True disciple of Spevins, I was prepared to take the odds. Heads or tails. Vengeance or annihilation. Had I not been a 'lifer'? What worse fate could their ingenuity prepare for me? Fools, triple fools, to have been deceived, by a part I had well sustained, into taking the badge from off my arm! All terror of punishment was past. I feared nothing which they could do to me, for I had undergone the worst. Even if I were caught and sent back to Dartmoor, my condition would be better than it had been; for I should have done something in return for servitude—I should have left my mark in

that shaft sticking between the shoulder-blades—I should no longer be gnawed by the intolerable bitterness of wrong.

Thus pondered I, in the blank security of my retreat. The young coalheaver, mate of the deceased, stared more than ever, and became more mystified and more awe-stricken. Thanks to Spevins he had tobacco in his pipe, and it took all his time, whilst smoking, to wonder who, and what I was, and why I should have chosen so uncheerful an abiding-place. My intentions could scarcely be felonious, for, during the first month or two of my sojourn in Black Jack Alley, I never moved out of the nook wherein we dwelt. I was always reading, or sitting in a day-dream with my chin upon my hand. And then the people who dropped in occasionally. Jaggs—slightly disguised, his glory under a bushel—would creep in sometimes, under cover of the dusk, to spend a jovial evening; and sometimes Spevins; bringing with them a companion or two in mysterious great-coats, and mufflers; and viands, whose succulence was to make up to me for the dreariness of confinement; and

books, and odds and ends of comfort. Jaggs, even in demi-glory, was to the coalheaver a scarifying and blinding spectacle, and on each and every visit of the transcendent individual in *peau de Suède* gloves with greased interiors, the simple fellow became humbler and more amazed. Why a man like me who belonged to a different class, who had such noble friends, and was not devoid of means, should elect to dwell in so unsavoury a spot, passed his dim comprehension. But after all he and his were indirectly the gainers, for he did odd jobs for which he was paid by me, and Spevins never called without a friendly nod and timely assistance for the family who dwelt below. Therefore the brawny youth wisely made up his mind that it was no business of his, in which prudent resolve he was abetted by the serenaders, who were called in now and then to enliven us with minstrelsy, and who considered themselves amply repaid for a song by the largess of a polony, accompanied by a draught of ale.

Both Jaggs and I were completely under the dominion of Spevins, with this difference :

the gentlemanly one, haughty to him no more; was a trusty lieutenant, who, in obedience to orders, watched me with a lynx-like surveillance. There was no need for the burglar to watch him, for he had established himself *in loco parentis* to the wayward manipulator of the thimbles and the pea, and the latter was quite pleased with the arrangement. But with me it was different. I was not to be a slave, or one of the rank and file. I was, as it were, a future sovereign enduring his minority. He who would willingly obey my orders later, was my tutor now. It was his business at present to instruct, and also to see that his precious charge was kept out of peril. Therefore, whilst treating me with deference and respect, he kept a tight hand upon my movements, and set Jaggs also to watch lest haply I should repent and disappear. It was curious that Jaggs should have shown no jealousy; but his shrewdness and his selfishness prevented such a contingency from arising, for he was a sensible fellow when not playing the baby, and knew where his interest lay. When he came to supper, for instance, and brought a chicken,

he invariably helped himself to the liver wing; but then he also was careful to see that I had the other, in preference to any comrade who might have arrived in his train. Whilst discussing pros and cons, in the quarry or the 'farm,' he had at first resented the proposition pitilessly urged by Spevins, that his gentility was not real enough to pass muster among sagacious butlers. But his common sense brought him round ere long, and he confessed with his light laugh that on his sun there might be a flaw or so, and that it was better to run no risks. His gentility, he was fain to admit *en petit comité*, was more remarkable for splendid deportment than for high-toned conversation such as should impress grooms of the chamber. He admitted with engaging frankness that he might possibly be floored by an æsthetic butler in a verbal conflict, and therefore condescended with grace to occupy a lower seat, which, as Spevins pointed out, was just made for him. His own department was cut and dried by the admirable premier in the furry cap—a department connected chiefly with masters at race-

courses and the pockets in which they kept their chattels. He was to stray into our public-house now and again as a casual stranger, and to make up, in an infantine manner, to such valets as had theatrical proclivities ; he was to be full of innocent enthusiasm and comic songs, and to induct the said valets, with a view to becoming intimate, into the mysteries of the music-halls, having himself obtained the *entrée* through some houris in the back-row of the ballet. This was an interesting *rôle*, one requiring considerable skill, so he could afford to admit without too much loss of dignity, that I was the real picture-card whose presence in the pack was to win the odd trick ; and that therefore it was clearly his interest to see that I was amused as well as watched. Therein lay the difference between Jaggs and Spevins, and I knew it all the while. The one was really attached to me by reason of my brilliant qualities, the other made believe to be so in furtherance of his own future prospects.

But try to amuse me as they would, time hung terribly heavy on my hands, and I felt

the irksomeness of this short confinement more than the years at Dartmoor. The discipline of the prison had its effect on me as on others. I knew that there I must do as I was bidden in the long-run. Here there was nothing to prevent me from walking abroad except prudence, and there were moments of exasperation when that solitary virtue well-nigh deserted me. Not quite though. Unstable and impulsive I used to be in the old days, but that was altered now. I lived for one object and one only ; so, curbing the restlessness which devoured me, I forced myself to remain secluded, and dreamed, and built castles in the air.

There was one vision which, disarmed as I was by inaction, persisted in appearing before my eyes—the vision which, in the early days of my travail, had been the cause of my most poignant anguish. As those years advanced, and my nature became twisted into the new warp, the vision had grown fainter, for my mind became engrossed with pictures of earth and hell, and not of heaven ; and this particular vision was crocus-hued, like sunrise.

It was a vision of a maiden with a tangle of golden hair. What—in the lapse of time wherein I had been so tempest-tossed—had become of my little Mildred? It was in vain that, sitting with hands before me now (accustomed for many years to fresh air and muscular exertion), I strove to banish the portrait of my darling from my thoughts. The sacrifice I had made, in renouncing my identity for her sake, seemed only to have endeared her to me the more. It was in vain that the outcast kept repeating, that Ebenezer Anderson was not her father, that he had nothing to do with her, or she with him. The twain were as far removed as the two poles. And then the oddity of it all would wring from him a smile. What could the dilettante licensed victualler, fresh from money grubbing in Australia and not a bit proud, have in common with the painter's daughter, the lovely blue-eyed blonde, who was the admired of all comers? Of course she was lovely, and of course she was admired—a radiant vision of gladsome youth and beauty; as a child was she not an angel, wanting only wings?

She must be grown up now, or nearly so. How old? Sixteen! Many a girl is quite a woman at that age, while some linger yet on the confines of childhood. How was it with my darling, my golden-haired pet, upon whose silken cocoons I was never to look again? As the vision persisted in shining out clearer and more clear upon the wall, I caught myself with choking sensations in my throat, and, groaning, clasped my eyes with my two hands to keep out the too well-remembered picture. What was this? A fine avenger, truly, who was ready to break down like an hysterical school-girl at the apparition of a phantom. Oh, blessed Past, in that it is irretrievable! Mocking visions, why should I fear ye? What is done is done, and may not be undone; what is past is gone, and may never be recalled. I had dug my own grave, and it was a yawning chasm. I had got into my coffin and slammed down the lid. How silly, then, to quarrel with its narrowness. 'Twixt me and those who once were mine was death and a new birth—the barrier of another life, of a different nature, of a new identity. What folly, then, was this of mine (how often I re-

peated it !), this looking back from the plough, this yearning with outstretched arms after that which was out of reach ! What right had I to yearn when I was satisfied that things were well ? The Past was closed and clamped ; the Present was a blank page. My new and different life lay in the Future, not the Past. I must not look back, but forward.

Thus reasoned the outcast with himself in solitude, striving to find a refuge from haunting visions in his books. Among the miser's effects was a cracked looking-glass, and in it each day I made a long survey of my appearance, with an eye to Scotland Yard. The same gloomy fixed expression of calm was there, which had startled me when on coming out of prison I had first looked in a mirror. The lowering, sullen look of which warders and governors alike had complained as dangerous, I had never seen ; but even this cold stony mask of calm was ominous enough of ill. It was the threatening lull before the hurricane, in which twigs and leaves hang motionless as if enchanted, to be tossed an instant later like mad things, torn

with wild fury from their boughs. It was too peculiar and unearthly a facial mask for a human being to wear. The eyes looked out as cold as Jaggs's ; the hard lines about the lips were not pleasant to behold.

I observed with satisfaction, however, that my beard and hair grew apace. Although only thirty-five years old, both were grizzled, and that pleased me too. So altered in colour of locks and in expression, a friend of early days would look in my face and pass me by. So far, so good. It would not be well for Ebenezer Anderson to resemble that other man, who was buried twelve years ago. To each of us our distinct individuality. That other was dark-haired, rose-cheeked, given to swift moods, like cloud-flecks on a plain. Were these the peculiarities of Ebenezer ? No. This expression will not do, though, I muttered, as I surveyed myself. It must be modified, for it is uncanny. Detectives recognise men by their expression more than by their features, and so can penetrate well-nigh any disguise. I must bring my features under control, as I have my temper. Pooh ! is not anything possible for him who is

over-mastered by one motive? The really dangerous men are those who have set all upon a single cast; who, so that their puny results be gained, will stake against it heaven, hell, eternity! I was one of them, as my face showed too plainly. It was visible in my eyes, engraved in the furrows on my brow; and the outward evidence of this must at once be charmed away. I would alter it. It would occupy my time and thoughts, to the exclusion of that vision, to sit for hours before the glass, and educate my eyebrows into a shape which should become habitual. This might be achieved without too much labour if practised constantly. Why not? Was not I a man absorbed by one idea—revenge? Despite myself, there was that haunting vision pictured on the wall—alas, alas!

The longer I remained idle, the more difficult did it become to chase away that vision. When Jaggs and Spevins had departed, after a carouse, it visited me in slumber. One day I announced to Spevins that I could endure my state no longer. 'I must go out and jostle against unblighted mortality,' I

said. 'Cooped up here in this horrible den, where the sights which I see daily would tear my heart to shreds if I had one to tear, I am getting hipped and out of sorts. Heavens! what are Pentonville and Dartmoor to this? The crime of these men and women is Poverty; and their punishment is infinitely more severe than that meted by the law to our caged criminals. Offensive though it is, I am not sorry, for one reason, to have looked on the seamiest side of Liberty. We are fully justified in acting as we are going to do. Lazarus was a donkey not to murder Dives, instead of grovelling with the dogs about the gate; for, if he had perished in the attempt, he would have at least shortened his unbearable existence. But the constant contemplation of him and all his large family here is wearing to sensitive nerves, and I don't like it. I must leave this foul cupboard in which you mew me up at all events for a few hours every day, or, I tell you plainly, I won't answer for myself.'

Spevins smiled his bright smile and showed his teeth.

'All right, guv'nor,' he answered, touching

his furry head-gear. 'The only queer part of it is that you should a kep it up so long. Your hair's sprouting as fast as mustard and cress used on my old granny's petticoat. We ought to make a exhibition of yer in a glass case ; yet that might be ill-conwenient, considering that our glass-house wont a-bear stone-throwing. It must be mortal trying, surelie, to be still a prisoner after twelve years of "27 Party, all krekt." I tell yer, I could not hev' done it, not to save me from a second lagging straight away. But it won't do to spile the whole job by being in a hurry. If you must go out, go out at dusk, and be in again before daylight, and avoid the streets where the shops are too brightly lighted ; likewise the lively district where I live and Jaggs and the rest of us. Detectives are hovering there constantly, like cats meouling on the tiles. But, bless yer, I don't mind 'em. They can't bring nothing up agin me, and my ticket's in my pocket, and I'm behaving on the square, and working at a trade as a blind, so I'm all right. But you've gone abroad, we must remember ; and though the mustard and cress is getting on, I can't say

as it's not to be improved upon. Give another month's growth, and you shall come out of quarantine; and then we'll start fair upon the job.'

Of course he was right. It was weak of me to be impatient. Yet to remain constantly within these four walls was out of the question. But I would begin a series of night rambles; would wander in secluded and half-lit streets; in the parks and quiet squares; and, whilst breathing fresher air than ever penetrated into our seething warren, would revolve the great scheme again in my simmering brain, to be sure that the chain was perfect—each link securely riveted.

My first walk was to Mayfair, to look for myself upon the scene of future triumphs. Nothing, certainly, could be more admirable than the position of the house. Leaning against the opposite blank wall, I could, from my dark corner, survey what passed within; and I remained there for hours watching; for, before the present landlord should leave, it was obviously my duty to learn my business. The ground-floor was divided into two bars—each provided with swing doors—one

of which faced the by-street, the other the mews. Nothing, I remarked, could be more distinct than the two classes of visitors. Tall men, with powdered heads, surmounted by billycock hats perched sideways ; their nether limbs clad in tightly-fitting breeches of gaudy hue, and pink silk stockings ; their bodies arrayed in smart shooting-jackets of sporting cut ; lounged in by the mews-door, and sprawling over the bar, cutty in mouth, discussed with their fellows the small-talk of the evening, chucking under the chin now and then the pretty barmaids who were constantly working at the beer-engine. I could see all that passed, for the place was brilliantly illuminated, and I in darkness. There was a sprinkling of shorter gentlemen, with hair close cut, and smooth chins held as in a vice by well-starched shirt-collars. These, I observed, kept aloof a good deal, though a gentleman in powder would occasionally call one over to him, and, with noble-minded condescension, permit him to dip his nose into his own pot. But this was seldom, for it was a breach of etiquette which smacked of the setting of bad precedents. The short

gentlemen (whose trousers were curiously tight) were brisk in manner, and a trifle rollicking, and evidently fond of a broad jest. The tall ones, on the other hand, were dignified and languid; drooping over the bar like fragile willows, talking to each other in undertones, complimenting the barmaids, with suave *bonhomie*; more given to plaintive, not to say dyspeptic, smiles than laughter.

‘I must leave the under-servants to Jaggs,’ I reflected, as I observed the elegant loftiness of their demeanour. ‘I don’t understand them, and could never worm myself into their confidence.’ Let us have a peep at the others.

Changing my position, and approaching closer—for the by-street side was shuttered and more secluded—I looked through a chink between the exiguous curtains of faded red moreen into the interior. The ways and manners of this part of the establishment were quite different from those of the other. Seats were provided, long tables and windsor chairs. The floor was trimly sanded, and spotted by a multitude of spittoons. An old-fashioned piano occupied one corner. The bar was

screened from view by curtains running on brass rods, like those of a family pew, which were constantly being drawn aside, with a click, and run back again, as the presiding Hebe looked in upon the company, with beaming face, to ask what such and such a gentleman had ordered. There was no standing about or 'willowing,' as in the opposite compartment. A very stately gentleman, in evening dress—who looked like a bishop—smoked a meerschaum pipe in an arm-chair; and others, the very pink of fashionable sobriety, sat in other chairs, listening, and throwing in a softly-modulated remark from time to time. The stately gentleman's voice could be heard in a muffled way through the glass. He was saying—with the wave of a wrist which ought to have worn ruffles—'that her ladyship having dined early, and gone to the theater, he was able to spend a good long evening with his friends;' whereupon those round about broke into a hum of self-gratulation. 'It was not the case so often as he could desire,' he went on; 'for it was notorious that masters and mistresses were impertinent tyrants, whom there was no

satisfying, and whom it wasn't worth while to try and satisfy, and whose tempers were distressingly short if they were kept waiting.'

Another hum; this time of commiseration and approval.

'They seem to be under the delusion,' put in another, who wheezed and was scant of breath, like Hamlet, 'that we've nothing better to do than to sit outside the door in the draught, to be summoned. They persuade themselves that we're made of a commoner clay, though very often we're cleverer by long chalks. Excuse the expression, gentlemen; it is not polished, I am aweer, but it's expressive.'

'It's the rhino that makes all the difference, and it's a beastly shame!' blurted out another, who hovered between despondency and indignation; but the sentiment being clothed in unfitting language, he was frowned down and subsided into melancholy.

Then a fourth gentleman, in beautiful turquoise studs and fair whiskers, who desired to come to the rescue, remarked, with encouraging hopefulness, that 'there would soon be an end to all this nonsense. The movement for

employing impoverished ladies as housemaids was a step in the right direction, as tending towards equality; their presence would disseminate a *ginnysickwaw* in the servants' 'all, which,' the speaker thought he might presume to say, 'would be delightful. Masters and domestics would be on quite another footing by-and-by; a footing of give-and-take for mutual convenience, whereby the one would undertake to sacrifice himself on Monday, if the other undertook to follow suit on Tuesday. As it is,' he averred, 'it's uncommon 'ard for 'em, thank goodness, to find men who will degrade themselves with hair-powder. Powder'll go out first, and then liveries. Why should decent men be made guys of, in blue and yaller, like parrots, for the dirty street-boys to chaff? One and all here present 'ave bin footmin in our time, so it's for the good of the cloth that masquerading clothes should be done away with. I'm 'appy to say, gentlemen,' the orator concluded, amid cheers, 'that there won't be much more of "Why the devil, James, you blithering idiot, didn't you come sooner?" Soon it'll be, "James, if you desire to go to

the opera to-morrow evening, I'll make a point of dining at my club, and her grace will oblige you by having tea in her room."'

This prophecy, on the part of so faultlessly genteel a person as the speaker, opened a vista of advantageous changes which enthralled all present, and reduced the company to silence. It was, indeed, a noble subject for meditation. They whiffed at their pipes without another word, gazing with solemnity each into his own spittoon, and taking long draughts from time to time, in their abstraction, from the gin-and-water of their neighbours.

As I strolled away, fearful of my eaves-dropping being noticed, I reflected that there was much to be done with men like these, who, by constant contact with a higher class, have picked up a smattering of accomplishments of which they are inordinately vain. A little knowledge, as we know, is dangerous; vanity a big hole in the armour. It is one of the glaring evils of our day, that everybody is trying to appear other than he really is. Upper servants are prone to the showing off of second-hand airs and graces. The snub-

blings which they constantly receive from overbearing superiors embitters them ; they come to look on their masters as natural enemies, who desire to keep them out of their rights, and whom it is, therefore, proper to circumvent by every possible means, instead of as friends to whom they should look up for advice and help, when they feel their own judgment to be faulty. Actuated by this spirit they would be easy to get round, I thought ; for, though they mean honestly enough, they have but in a small degree their masters' interest at heart, and would not be so jealous of encroachment on the part of strangers as the race of old servants was, which has, unhappily, vanished from the land. Established as landlord of that tavern, nothing would be easier than to ingratiate myself with these people, by working on their ignorance and flattering their prejudices—men who were smarting with discontent over what appeared to them a false position, and carried away beyond the line of common sense by the arrogance which is the handmaid of ignorance.

These evening walks did me good ; and I

spent most of the dark hours abroad, taking my rest by day, and so saw little during the ensuing weeks of Jaggs or Spevins, who did not deem it prudent to visit me by daylight. I rambled all over London, and many a strange sight I came upon. Sometimes I chatted with policemen on their beats, who were only too delighted to break the monotony of their solitary tramp by a little passing gossip with a wayfarer. Sometimes I crept down to the river-side, and fell, without knowing it, under the calming influence of the dark expanse of slowly-gliding water—the ghostly-flitting barges—the still masses of frowning buildings which towered far up into the night. At such moments, while listening to the subdued throb of the traffic which never ceases, that haunting vision would stand out like a bright speck in the surrounding gloom, and I strove less and less to avoid looking upon it. By degrees I began to turn over openly in my mind the chances of what had happened to my daughter, instead of striving not to think of her at all.

‘What was my Mildred doing—what was my Mildred doing?’ The words rang in my

ears, as, leaning my cheek on the stone, I gazed into the botttomless black depths over a bridge parapet, or sat down to rest upon a doorstep. What was she doing—what was she doing? Was she sleeping the unruffled sleep of youth, her lips parted by the influence of happy dreams? or was she wakeful—in pain—or sorrow? Pray heaven that it might not be thus with my dear child! Her father had suffered enough for an entire family. Surely it was fair to suppose that his darling might escape scot-free. Perhaps she was dead! As that thought came on me, I started up with a shiver, and strode on rapidly, a chill creeping along my bones, which was not due to the cold night air. And if she were dead, I hastened to argue, so much the better. What could have happened, I wondered as I walked, since that fatal day whereon we parted? Thank God! the shadow of her father's curse had never crossed her path. Not a soul on all the earth knew the dreadful truth—that she was a felon's child! No!—nor never should. I had had strength given me to renounce my name while there was yet time. How thank-

ful I was for that. It was the single bit of success in my wretched and disastrous career; and for that small mercy I felt a kind of half-scornful gratitude.

But was I justified in supposing that all had gone well with her?

If the father was to be smitten down by an unexpected sledge-hammer blow, why not the child? Strange! in all my self-communing the thought of my wife never occurred to me. We had always quarrelled—disliked and snarled at each other, as a dog snarls at a cat. She was a querulous woman—always wanting what she could not have—irritating my hot temper to boiling-pitch. Why should I think of my wife? The remembrance of her was distasteful. She was a clever woman—there was no denying that. Forced by the circumstance of my sudden disappearance to bestir herself, she had, doubtless, been driven to throw aside her querulous ways, and put her shoulder to the wheel. How many a discontented creature would attain peace of mind, and cease to be actively disagreeable, if compelled to arise and work! The thought of my wife had

never troubled me ; she had many friends to rally round her, who would see that she did not starve. In my memory she occupied a dusky place—being negatively odious, nothing more.

It was curious that in pondering about my child, I had hitherto thought of her as happy—being possessed by so strong a conviction that I was bearing her burden of sorrow as well as my own, that I was able to feel content that I should have severed myself from her for ever. But in the course of my solitary midnight rambles, when I began to permit myself to dwell upon the subject, the unwelcome possibility obtruded itself that all might not have gone well with Mildred ; and the fact of my non-existence as her father filled me with fitful apprehension. Here was a contingency which had never appealed before to my imagination. Her mother was ill-tempered—how dreadfully well I knew it!—perhaps she had been cruel to her child—ah, no ! that could not be. How could a woman—a mother ? No, that was not possible. But perhaps my wife herself had joined the majority, leaving the little one to the care

of strangers. What then? I rose up from the bench on the embankment whence I had been watching the saffron glow upon the water which hinted of coming dawn, and hurried away to my eyrie. Like a spectre, the first tawny flush was the signal for me to vanish; but I made up my mind, as I sped through the intricacies of lane and alley, that it behoved me (prone as I was to self-torture) to find out the truth about the girl. How, I knew not; but I would find out something—of that I was determined, and with as little delay as possible. For the thoughts with which I was powerless to cope were torment—any certainty would be better than this new suspense.

If I had seen Spevins I would have made a confidant of him—have told him that there was another hidden life, crusted over, but still existing—and have implored him to make such inquiries as must set my mind at rest; but I did not see him, so (as we deemed it unsafe to communicate by letter) I was obliged to undertake the matter on my own account.

It never struck me to ask myself what I should do if all were not well with my little

fairly ; to suggest to myself that ignorance is bliss in a case wherein the spectator has no power to interfere. A disembodied spectre condemned to disappear at cock-crow ! Such was my position. I was a spectre, doomed for a while to walk the earth—to hover round her I loved—without speech, unseen, intangible. How useless.

I turned the matter over with extreme caution before deciding what to do. By this time I had lived five months in Black Jack Alley, whose listless world-worn occupants were too much engrossed, after the first instant of surprise, with the all-absorbing occupation of searching for a crust, to take much heed of me. My friend, the young coalheaver, fetched and carried like a valet with the ponderous nimbleness of a hippopotamus on skates ; but I could not trust him with so delicate an affair as this. Forbidden still to emerge by day, I must pursue my inquiries at night, or, at all events, after dark, which was mysterious and difficult. There was no help for it. In the first instance, I must toil up to Hampstead and reconnoitre my old home, however painful the sight of its

time-worn bricks might be. Yet why should the contemplation of it be painful to one situated as I was? Is it a matter of pain to the spirits of the departed to haunt the places where they moved in life? Perhaps it is. Some hold that it is a portion of the punishment meted out by Eternal Justice to badly-behaved ghosts to watch those they loved on earth, and to know how utterly and how speedily they are forgotten by them. Well, I wished to be forgotten. I desired nothing of my daughter, save to see her alive and prosperous, happy, in good health, and free from care; unmindful of a parent of whom her reminiscences must be so slight. If it could be permitted to me to look upon that picture from my ambush once, or else upon another of a tombstone, (either of which would satisfy me that she was free from pain), I would promise never to regret the past. Did I regret it now? I would promise to shut myself up for good or evil in my second identity for ever, and never, never to come out of it; to march straight onward in obedience to my compact with the spirits, casting no more surreptitious glances either to the right hand or the left.



CHAPTER IV.

IN THE NIGHT-WATCHES.

T was now the end of January, when night wraps London betimes in a shroud of sable. I was no longer so close a prisoner as heretofore, for the fogs hung heavy over the town for days together, and persons with the brand on them made the most of those hours of impunity. Choosing such a day, I sallied forth to commence investigations. Did I dare to go straight to my own home, boldly ring the bell, and ask the servant about its inmates? Why not? I was so changed that no friend of the old time would know me. There was nothing to dread. Perchance by watching the house I could find out all I wished to know. If I could only see my child—catch

but a passing glimpse of her for an instant, tending her birds or intent on household cares, with a smile on her lips and the flush of health upon her cheek—the outcast would go away content.

I trudged to Hampstead, the rime gathering upon my beard and hair; marveling at the changes which had taken place since I had lived there. Twelve years! To some a lifetime of chequered excitement; to others a monotonous round. Belsize Park, where I used to sketch with little Mildred at my knee, was swept clean away. It was a bit of real country which I used to love, with unkempt hedges, broken palings through which the cows meandered as they listed; pollard willows, lofty elms, picturesque glimpses of watery ditch and crazy plank, such as it was a joy to transfer to paper. For days and days I used to sketch there, humming the last popular tune, while Mildred, a splash of gaudy colour in her bright dress, flew in the sunlight like a butterfly, pouncing on a daisy or a dandelion wherewith to pelt the painter, with crows of childish glee. Ah me! ah me! only twelve years ago. Could

it indeed be possible? Had this sad wandering spectre been a living man twelve years ago? No. The place was as changed as he—a century must have passed since then. In place of cows and dandelions, I came upon a broad straight road, bounded on either side by a row of handsome villas. What need had I to be fearful of recognition? This was another city in another hemisphere, that was looming through wreaths of vapour.

Sumptuous houses, homes of wealthy men; revealing in the ruddy glow of firelight, through tight-closed windows, glimpses of rare pictures, marble statues, treasures of ceramic art, such as in days gone by would have sent my young blood dancing. Where fields had been there were trim gardens, well-filled conservatories. The time I had been in duress must, in good sooth, have been a hundred years, not twelve. What should spectres know of time? I, a new Rip Van Winkle, should find my Mildred an old hag—a tottering crone, toothless and blind, her limbs racked by rheumatism and her back bent—a miracle of age. And yet not so. Passing beyond Belsize Park, the

old world aspect was as it used to be. Hampstead was the same as I had known it—as George the Third had known it, or good Queen Anne. There stood the ancient red-brick square, with its quaint gables and narrow windows, its prim white sashes and mouldering expanse of moss. The paved centre was as silent and deserted as usual, seeming to me, as it always did, as though all the dwellers there—in sacque and high-heeled shoe—had moved out *en masse*, by common consent, ‘to make an end on’t,’ and lie cosily down in the old churchyard close by, under the flamboyant gravestones and solemn feathery yews. The three-sided excrescences of wood still lurched over the thoroughfare from the first-floor, threatening each moment to slide headlong and impale upon the spikes below the stately dames reposing in the window-seats. The beau-pots of greenery still lurked on narrow sills, held there by wires and lengths of fragile twine. How wrong had been my reckoning! It was not a hundred years, nor even fifty, that I had been away. I must have slumbered over my sketching. It was a nightmare of a few

seconds only, a horrible dream, from which I had just awakened ; and my little Mildred, four years old, would rush forth presently from yonder porch to bid her papa come in to dinner. There stood the house where my darling had been born—how strangely the sight of it affected me ! I felt sorry as I stood and stared, and withal angry, revengeful, hotly wicked. I was not dreaming. It was twelve years that I had been away at least ; the door was altered in shape, in colour ; there were curtains in the windows which I had never chosen ; creepers clinging to the old walls, as though they knew them well, which I had never planted. That was my house, and yet it was not mine—just as I was alive, and also dead.

It came home to me as I gazed, with a feeling of sickness, that things were more different than I had supposed. Yet how silly I was to feel such fear. Was it likely that the bread-winner could go away without a ‘By your leave,’ and, coming back again ever so long afterwards, find everything precisely as he left it ? How ridiculous was the proposition ! Did I, in my heart of hearts,

expect the door to be opened by a smiling and repentant spouse, with an invitation to come in again and forget the past? What did I expect—a prodigy of some kind? If I was going to make a fool of myself, it would be better to depart while I still had my reason. My wife had nailed new creepers on the wall, had altered the hall-door. She was sole mistress here; I, a stranger. Turning to go, I looked again, and stopped. The curtains in the dining-room were green. As a hue, my wife always had the strongest repugnance to green. Therefore she had ceased to live here. Was she alive, or was she dead? Having trudged hither, I must learn something positive. Impelled by a force which I could not withstand, I ran forward and pulled the bell.

Tremulously, with a faintness crawling along my limbs, I mentioned to the abigail my name—the old Spanish name long since unfamiliar to my lips, not the accursed English one.

‘Did anyone of that name live there? No—oh no! I did not want to see those who dwelt there—I had been commissioned

to make inquiry, nothing more, in order to—what? No such people known? Surely the directions I had received had been correct. Had no one of the name ever lived there? Would the servant be so obliging as to inquire? Might I step inside while she asked the question?

‘Certainly not.’

The woman closed the door on me—I was suspicious-looking, and might steal umbrellas—and by-and-by re-opened it.

‘A painter of that name had once lived there,’ she said, ‘but he was dead, ever so many years ago.’

‘Was there no family?’ I stammered, with dry lips.

She frowned, and the look of suspicion deepened. Was I a detective, or a detective’s jackal?

‘Oh yes! There was a wife, who had married again,’ she believed.

‘A daughter?’

‘How was she to know—a dozen perhaps,’ and indignant at being suspected of turning too keen an eye on other people’s business, she made an effort to end the colloquy.

‘One word more, only one!’ I cried, placing my foot between the door and the post; ‘if the lady were re-married, what was her name, and where did she live?’

‘Well, I never!’ exclaimed the now wrathful domestic; ‘move away your foot, or I’ll call master—you imperent, aggravating man, you! Her name’s Trevelyan, and her second husband (the first was a good-for-nothing lot, I’m told) is a harchitect.’

‘Where does he live?’

‘How should I know—get out!’

I removed my foot; she slammed-to the door, and I heard her put the chain up. Was Spevins right then, and my disguise not yet complete? Was gaol-bird still written on my forehead—did my clothes exhale the odour of the prison-house? Possibly. At all events, it behoved me to be careful. It was rash to have rung that bell; still more so to have been so eager. How could I be sure that I would not be recognised?

Married again! Here was new food for reflection. And to an architect—probably in a good position, then. So much the better. Certainly the fact of dwelling in such a sea

of hopeless wretchedness as that where I abode must have a tendency to make one morbid. I was unstrung, and had been exciting myself unnecessarily. Nothing could be more natural than the course events had taken, and yet I was surprised and bewildered as by a new shock. Trevelyan! A good old name—who could he be, I wondered? Not one of our acquaintances in the old time. Did he love Mildred? Of course he did—sure, no one who knew her could help doing that. Mrs. Trevelyan! How funny it sounded! The first twinge over, the news affected me not at all. I having mysteriously vanished, it was only fair that she, a young and pretty woman, should marry again after sufficient lapse of time, if so be that she was lucky enough to find another who would endure her querulous temper. Then I chuckled as I wandered home—Mrs. Trevelyan! A grand lady, doubtless, with carriages and horses. What would be her feelings if she could come suddenly to know that she was a felon's wife, and a bigamist? The wife of a ticket-of-leave man—a released murderer! She had been the bane of my

existence during its youthful prime—how splendidly I could punish her by drawing aside the veil! And my innocent daughter—did I wish, too, to punish *her*? What idle, bootless thoughts were these! Why should I desire to revenge myself upon my wife? Such grovelling, petty spitefulness ill-became one who had steeled his heart against mankind. Mine was a lofty vengeance upon a race—not on an individual, and a woman too. Fie! I was growing maudlin as well as morbid. This moping would never do. If only the next few weeks would quickly pass, and allow me to get to work in real earnest!

For several evenings after this, trying to forget the new intelligence, I hovered round the scene of our future enterprise, arranging details in my mind's eye—spinning imaginary cobwebs; and one evening while I watched, was no little alarmed to be caught in the act of looking through the chink into the holy of holies of the butlers. As I peered in, two men issued through the swing-door, and almost brushed me with their coats as they went by.

‘He’s a good sort,’ one was saying. ‘It’s a pity he gives up the place. I’m sure we’ve given him all our patronage, but some fellars never know their advantages till it’s too late. Many a time when missus ’as ’ad the megrims, and ’as gone upstairs early, I’ve sent up the barley-water tray before my lady’s lady ’as ’ad time to comb out ’er ’air, which, as you know, ain’t decent in a well-ordered ’ouse, in order to come and patronise this man for ’alf-an-hour before closing-time. I’ve sometimes moved the clock on to make my lady go to bed. And do you suppose he’s grateful? Not ’e! ’E’s respectful, I must allow, and we can’t expect more, for human natur’s as poor and weak as this chap’s liquor. It’s a pity ’e’s agoin’, for we don’t know ’oo’s comin’.’

‘It don’t matter,’ his companion replied ‘He’s low—deuced low. Poppilar enough with the footmin and sich like sprats, becos’ too famillar, but he won’t do for gentlemin like us. We want somethink here more like ourselves — something *elligong* and *digadgy*, more suited to the society of “the room.” Ain’t it a curous thing—you must have remarked it—how the style of conversa-

tion changes when, after tart, we leave the servants' 'all and muv' to cheese. It's quite different and refreshing. Mrs. 'Ousekeeper opens out like a flower, and as for my lady's lady, she perks up and enlivens the board. I was obliged to tell this fellar t'other day, that, though respectful and that, he wasn't up to the mark of his sitiuation. He looked downcast and hurt, and mumbled somethink behind his hand about man being made to err; and I was sorry for him, for we must be lenient to those below us. So I replied: "That's jest where it is," I says. "You mean for the best, I know. P'r'aps man was made to err," I says. "But if you wants to err," I says, "you must go and err somewhere else, my man," I says.'

The speakers passed without observing the secret watcher, and I breathed again; but though they were too deep in talk to heed me, the adventure taught me a lesson. I must shun the district for the present, or else they would say, later on, with nudges—this gentleman victualler is the loafer we have seen about; and, in an enterprise like ours, to be suspected was to be lost. Oh,

those weary, weary days and nights ; would there never be an end of them ? What was I to do ? How apply my mind ? I yearned for the old quarry-work—for the nursing of malingerers in hospital—for anything, any object whereunto to pin my energies. The stagnation which was clothing me in lichen, permitted me to brood over myself and mine, and over the new discovery which I would so gladly have put away. Once busy, thorough occupation would banish the meditations that disturbed my serenity—that tormented my waking hours in a manner which was new and perilous.

Thus Mrs. Trevelyan and her husband, and my Mildred, would keep dancing fandangoes in my brain, and I had no weapon wherewith to chase them thence. In obedience to a whim, which I deprecated whilst I succumbed to it, I strode into a public-house, and asking for a directory, puzzled out the architects. Trevelyan. There was only one, and he dwelt on a terrace near Primrose Hill. This must be his house—her home. This man must be her husband. While sipping a pint of ale,

I marvelled what manner of man he was ; young or old, short or tall, good-tempered or the reverse. It would be something to do to watch that house and gain a surreptitious glimpse of its inmates. I resolved, despite the warning of reason, to reconnoitre, but determined to be very careful—to ring no bells, make no inquiries. The outcast must be content dumbly to watch, night after night if need were, to roam around under cover of friendly mists. He must court the shadows and be prepared to flee before a breath. All the while I knew how dangerous this whimsey was, how idle—how wroth Spevins and his pals would be if ever they came to hear of my folly ; but I could not help it. Argue with myself as I would, I could not resist the impulse to learn something of the ways of the new family. The time had to be passed somehow. In a week or two, when quarantine was ended, so should my folly end. A power, stronger than my will, goaded me on meanwhile, before which I was as an autumn leaf.

It is a long step from Black Jack Alley to Primrose Hill ; and it was late

upon a certain evening in January that I came upon the terrace which I sought. A compact, yellow, bald-faced mansion, with big plate-glass windows, in form of bay, and a few yards of scrubby bushes fenced in by a monstrous balustrade between the windows and the road. So this was the home of my widow and our child; a comfortable-looking home, if a trifle vulgar; more ostentatious and ponderous in its show of comfort than the dear, crumbling, old-fashioned house in Hampstead Square. There were flower-boxes of garish tiles on every ledge, which seemed to scream out, 'Look at me!' and these set me thinking.

My wife, disagreeable in all other respects, was gifted with a sensitive feeling for colour. How changed must she be to endure those flower-boxes! Or was it that she was no longer the 'grey mare,' and that she was obliged to put up with what she did not like? And if she had found her master, was it for good or evil? Had he, exorcising the evil spirit, transformed her into a good woman, or was she become a devil? As these conjectures flitted past my mental sight, I

stared at the hideous flower-boxes, fascinated.

What a pretty one was Ebenezer Anderson to prate of vulgarity or comfort, or take exception to trifles with fastidious taste ! It seemed as though renewed contact with the world were reviving the old Adam, for it had never struck me to criticise the architecture of the penal cells, or to find fault with the square many-windowed blocks of Pentonville or Millbank. I lounged on the opposite side of the way, endeavouring to read the details of the economy within upon the bald-faced house-front ; and watched the illuminated white window-blinds, hoping to detect what I panted to learn by black shadow-pictures moving on their surface. But it was apparently a well-managed house, where everything was arranged with decorum. No dishevelled housemaids scurried up areas and whisked back again ; no men-servants issued thence to hob and nob in neighbouring taverns. There was no information to be gained by staring at the mansion. Verily, my widow must be an altered woman !

The less I discovered, the more absorbed

did I become ; the more anxious to learn something positive before dismissing the subject for ever from my mind. Night after night I watched those windows, from behind angles or from within porticoes, lest the constable on the beat should observe me. Not that he troubled himself much about this decorous terrace, or that it troubled him. It was a well-mannered square-toed terrace. He was able to guess, by some occult method of his own, when the inspector was likely to come round. At other times he burrowed somewhere, and emerged when wanted, wiping his lips after a luxurious fashion that I envied, for it was bitter cold, and I, for my part, was well-nigh frozen.

One night. Two nights. Three nights. For aught I learned I might as well have been shivering in Siberia ; and would have done better to stop at home, abandoning the idiotic quest, but for the benefit which accrued from exercise and fresh air. Now and then a shade would flit across a blind, and I would be on tenter-hooks. The shade of a snub-nosed maid-servant, which told me nothing, and was gone. If I were to get inflammation of the

lungs, it would serve me right for my foolishness. Sure no boy bleating sonnets to his lady's eyebrow was ever more irrational than this grizzled, careworn watcher. What a good thing it was that Jaggs and Spevins had relaxed their surveillance! The King of Trumps was behaving like a knave. The goose who was to lay the egg of gold was waddling in dangerous pastures.

Yet, after all, there was no risk. The squaretoed terrace seemed to have overeaten itself, to be comatose with repletion, to toss its silk bandanna over its face and go to sleep. At the regularly appointed hour the lights were turned out; all was darkness; all was still.

But on the fourth evening the monotony of regular habit was broken. Peering from my refuge I stared with all my eyes, for unaccustomed lights flickered in one window and then another; there was an unusual stir. A blind on the ground-floor was pulled up hastily by a small hand, and as hastily pulled down again. There was a waving of arms against the light, a noise of loud voices raised in violent discussion, a clatter as of

the upsetting of heavy furniture. I wondered what this could portend ; whether anyone was ill, or whether there had been an accident or a quarrel. Perhaps my wife's temper, disimproved rather than the reverse, had broken out, to the detriment of the family peace. The constable was invisible. What was I to do ? Perchance somebody would come out in search of a doctor ; some one whom I could interrogate whilst offering assistance.

Nobody came out. The squall subsided. The lights were turned down by-and-by as usual, and nothing could be more primly quiet. How exasperating ! The wanderer, disappointed, was about to resume his rambles, when his sharpened hearing detected in the frosty air the clicking of a lock. He withdrew into a shadowed angle to watch. Yes ! there was something amiss within the bald-faced mansion after all ; one eye was open under the silk bandanna. The hall-door moved ajar, and was shut to with care ; and a shrouded figure glided rapidly away, round the corner, down the incline, and disappeared in Regent's Park.

Who could the figure be, and where could it be going at that hour? It was close on midnight, and the snow lay thick. The figure was tall and slender. 'It is a girl—it must be a girl!' I muttered, while, as I stealthily pursued, my heart beat fast. Under the trees—black as Erebus against the snow—I lost sight of the figure; then it flashed forth again, gliding across the open, past the Zoological Gardens, whence weird and dismal noises issued, unearthly cries and muffled groans and howls—enough in the solitude to make a nervous woman shrink. But that girlish figure did not shrink. It moved steadily along, so fast that I had much ado to follow it, till it came to the canal bridge which leads by way of Albany Street into the London roar again.

The girl stood for a moment as though undecided, and then vanished. Good heaven! had she leaped into the water? No; passing through a gap in the paling she had approached the water's brink, and was speeding along the towing-path, more slowly now, to where a clump of brushwood and

young trees concealed the water from the road. There, glancing hastily round, she sat down. A peculiar time, I thought, to select for *al-fresco* meditation, and in a hard frost, too. Stealing along, as though stalking game, nearer and nearer, I crept from tree to tree unobserved, and, the enveloping drapery tossed aside, I could make out two white arms and a billow of flaxen hair.

Regardless of the nipping frost, the girl sat upon the snow, wringing her hands from time to time, and moaning, whilst I leaned my hot head against a tree, and watched her. So did the cold twinkling eyes of heaven watch her, bright, pallid, blinking, countless eyes; so did the sparse, purblind lamps which threw zigzag reflections of dim red upon the frozen water, whose dark serpent-length coiled out of sight into the mist, lined with a wan stripe of towing-path. Beyond the canal, rising abruptly from the bank, stretched the Park's indefinite expanse, broken by what seemed to be phantom armies encamped upon a plain. Not a bough waved of the trees above, whose shade encompassed us; not a creature

stirred. In the centre of vast brawling London nature slumbered ; so did the towering squadrons on the shadowy camping-ground. But away from the oasis of peace, London fretted still. The murmur of its ceaseless babble came dimly on the ear ; the monotony of its faint flow broken now and again by the crisp whirr and shriek of a flying train, whose rattle sounded sharp, like pistol-cracks, as it reeled and tore away ; and ever and anon the tinkle of distant music was wafted in fragments on the air—in token that, in this narrow antechamber of ours, life and death, and joy and sorrow, and mirth and pain must jostle shoulder to shoulder, side by side—incongruous play-mates, some in rags and some in satins—till the folding-doors are flung wide which lead to the Grand Saloon, whence those in unfestive gear will be excluded.

After a while the girl got up, and, glancing timidly behind, sped onward as if the babbling roar were yet too near for one who had that to do which none but the stars might see ; and as I followed like a sleuth-hound upon the track, the same odd sensa-

tion stole over me as had weighed me down when I first arrived at Dartmoor.

This girl and I had left the world—so it seemed—when, leaving the highway, we had made across the snow, whose crumbling softness muffled our footsteps and made them without sound. We stood alone together facing eternity. How deep were those frozen waters, how thick the layer that covered them? As if in answer to my thought the girl stood on the extreme verge, and placed a foot upon the ice. It was thin and brittle, and gave way with a report which echoed, as I fancied, for miles in warning. A place had opened invitingly ; a black secret door. One moment of resolution. A leap in trusting faith, and the threshold would be past. A jump through the hole, a deadened splash, a few seconds of buffeting. Nothing would be left to tell the tale save foot-prints in the snow. Nay! no trace at all, for feathery atoms were floating down, flecking our clothes with white ; ere morning the sheet of snow would be even, white, unsullied. Only when the frost should break—that might be weeks hence—two nameless

bodies would come to light, miles away, after drifting under the crust—why not out to the sea? Meanwhile the twinkling orbs above would mark their progress, and murmur one to another. The dull eyes of the sickly lamps, when they blinked forth each day at dusk, would strain after them in vain. The sougning trees would nod their stately heads and point out the spot, with crooked fingers, which had been reached on the mysterious voyage; and, sighing, whisper of the secret which was confided to their keeping by the stars.

A superstitious impression took hold of me that I might not be predestined for the *rôle* of an avenger after all; that perhaps the spirits had been making sport of me—had schemed in their malice to turn me out upon the world battered, bruised—much worse—purposeless, as a sport for their malignity, and that some higher power had taken me in hand, bidding me escape from their spell at any cost. It was certain that I had battled hard against the mystic agency which had forced me to delve among buried days; but I was driven, despite myself, to act against my

judgment ; driven to hang about a house from contact with whose inmates I had every cause to shrink ; driven to dog this girl across the snow as far as this solitary spot by the dark waters—for what purpose ? Were we to make the plunge together, and advance side by side to meet our Maker face to face—or was it——

She moved again ; dipped a foot into the water through the hole she had made, and shrank again upon the ground. Impelled by the same inscrutable force which had urged me on this adventure, I left my lurking-place and stood by her side. She recoiled with a subdued scream ; examined me with startled looks ; then buried her face in both quivering hands, and sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

Great heaven ! Instinct had not deceived me ! There was no mistaking that face, though it seemed a lifetime since I had seen it. It was the face of my child—older, thinner, paler, but the same. Those were the blue eyes which had haunted me in dreams and waking visions ; that was her long fair hair, not so golden as it used to be,

but as fine and silken. Alas ! alas ! how wobegone a face. This was she whom I had hoped to find trilling little snatches of glad airs, as with gleesome visage she tended her favourite birds. She was unhappy. Good God ! she was meditating suicide ! Then the burthen that had crushed the humanity out of me, and left nought in my wrung heart but the lees of revenge and wickedness, was not heavy enough, after all, though I was ground to powder by its weight ! I was not bearing a double burthen, for my darling as well as for myself. She, too, was given one to carry, which had hollowed her cheek and marked her young brow with lines. There are thrilling moments of such agony in the lives of some of us as would kill if they endured longer than a second, when the sky turns to sable and the sun to blood. In such an access of despair I longed to seize her hands, saying : ‘ Mildred, you are right. Young though you be, you have arrived at the same goal as I, by a different route. You have led me here ; our way stands plain before us. We will leap together through yonder opening into light and peace beyond.’

The gust passed as it came, and my brain whirled and my heart banged within my breast. It was dead, that heart. Why then should it quiver thus? 'O my God!' my soul cried in a great yearning;—'surely not this young life, which has but dawned upon the world that I used to think so beautiful! Any sacrifice but this! May not my travail count for something? I will repent—will bend my stubborn knees and grovel in the dust. My life—take mine—and pass it through and through the flames. I will be brave. I have suffered much, and can yet endure for her sake. Spare her life—take mine—and thus shall both be blessed!'

But how vain were such prayers. Had I not yet learned the bitter lesson—not even yet? The cold stars blinked down as scornfully as ever. What mercy had been shown to me that I should expect compassion now? The roots of hope are strong; its tendrils tough. For myself, hope had been entombed long since; for her it yet survived. How could I save her? The cup of my bitterness was full and overflowed. I was absolutely powerless to help her in any way, for I was

a flitting unsubstantial ghost, compelled to look on the throes of one I loved better than myself, without being able to grasp her with my filmy hand.

She was still examining, with terror in her eyes, the world-worn apparition who had appeared upon her path, and cowered away with a fresh start of fear, when, looking down, I whispered the one word, 'Mildred.'

'My name,' she murmured. 'I do not know you, nor knew that I was followed. If you were sent after me, have pity—oh, have pity! I cannot go back!' she cried, clinging wildly to my arm, 'I will not. I came here to die, but am too great a coward. I am young—so very young! Say I am drowned and dead, and I swear that they shall never see me any more.'

Had she then come to this, the blithesome fairy, the sunbeam? How singular that in prison I should always have thought of her as happy! Had it not been so, could the victim have borne his torture? would he not rather have dashed out his brains against the wall? Who might say whether it was well that he had not made an end of it? for

though he hovered near his darling now—so near as to feel her breath, he could do no more to save her in this strait than if he were sleeping in the prison grave-yard. What was to be the fate of either? Father and child were equally forlorn—a pair of wandering waifs.

‘I dare not die,’ the girl went on. ‘I am afraid to look on God. I seemed to see Him frowning at me when I broke the ice just now. I will go away, far out of reach.’

‘Whither will you go, Mildred?’ I murmured. The name hung so tenderly about my lips, that she trembled in every limb. Poor thing! apparently she was little used to tenderness.

‘Who are you?’ she whispered with awe. ‘Who are you, who speak to me like that? I have never seen you—never! but the tones of your voice recall something, which I seem to have heard in some former life. You are not sent by them? No—I am sure I never saw that face before, though I have heard the voice;’ and in deep despondency she began to wring her hands together.

‘You are unhappy?’ I asked, advancing a step.

‘ Oh, how unhappy !’ she echoed.

‘ Why ? Is your mother cruel to you ?’

She glanced up with a quick look of distrust. Who was this strange-looking man that knew her name, and yet knew nothing more ? But the look faded as she sighed :

‘ My mother is hard and indifferent, but not cruel, and yet——’

‘ Your stepfather——’

‘ Oh, do not speak of him,’ she implored, as she rocked herself to and fro. ‘ He beat me to-night till my pride rose in arms, and my mother said nothing in my defence. It is not her fault ! She can’t help it ; she’s dull and stupefied.’ And then the gates of her pent-up wretchedness were opened, and forgetting the surroundings and the mysterious listener, she poured forth a recital of much misery, addressing her speech to the scornful stars, whose light glimmered on her upturned features.

I was right in supposing that by a second marriage my wife had found a master. After my departure she had lifted up her voice and called Heaven to witness how ill-used she was ; had battened on the griev-

ance which was a delicious luxury to one as querulous as she.

She chid her daughter with harsh words because she sorrowed for the vanished one whose disappearance was a nine days' wonder. Time passed. The widow's weeds were discarded. She married Mr. Trevelyan, and from that moment became another woman. She dared not utter a complaint or call her life her own, for the second husband was a stern harsh man who brooked no voice but one within his house, and who had a rough-fisted method of asserting his authority. For a while the fatherless girl avoided direct ill-usage, by holding herself aloof; but when in rapid succession Mrs. Trevelyan gave birth to three children, the position of the sole offspring of the first marriage became untenable. Hers was the place of Cinderella, to whose awkwardness every accident was attributed. It was made plain that in that sumptuous *ménage* she had no right to expect a home. A daily butt for paroxysms of ill-temper, a target for foul language and abuse and even blows, she threatened to run away, and was told with

coarse gibes that it would be well for her to do so, since her existence was a mistake. Having none with whom to take counsel, and feeling utterly alone, she dreaded to put her threats in execution, till at last on this very night, having retired to her chamber sore and bruised, and driven to bay, she had said to herself that her stepfather was right—she cumbered the earth, and must go off it. But at the culminating moment her resolution had failed; she dared not fling away the treasure which had been intrusted to her keeping, but would live—if Heaven so willed it—passing a secluded life in some remote corner where none should find her out.

‘Whither will you go?’ I repeated. This hapless stray knew not the hardness of the world!

‘It is of little moment whither,’ was her reply; then, seeming to remember where she was, she again inquired, timidly, what I knew of her, and how I had learned her name.

‘Your own father,’ I replied, evasively. ‘Do you remember him?’

‘Ah, my father!’ she repeated, sighing

deeply. 'If he had lived! if he had lived! But he died when I was quite a child—a tiny, heedless creature, who could not know his worth.'

'*His worth!* Was he a good man?'

'Good! Oh, how good and kind!' she replied, under her breath. 'I can recall dimly long summer days spent in the open air with him; when I wove flower-wreaths and daisy-chains, and chased the booming dragon-flies, while he carolled over his work. And then his intimates—how they missed and regretted him! though he was fiery and easily provoked, yet it was over in a moment, and they loved him none the less. Ah, my poor father!'

'And you also loved him?' It required all my strength of will to control a growing hoarseness in my voice. 'He died, you say. Do you know the manner of his death, or where he sleeps?'

'Do *you*?' Mildred retorted, clutching my wrist with abrupt vehemence. 'You do—I see you do! Tell me of him. Is he indeed dead, as I was told? My mother was always silent on the subject when she was sure that

he was never coming back. Yet I always hoped that some day he might return. It was so strange that I could gain no tidings.'

'Then you sought for him?'

'Yes, in secret—only a year ago. I tried to find some clue; to discover where he lies buried. But what could an inexperienced girl like me hope to do when my elders failed?'

'A foolish dream,' I responded, gloomily, 'which you did well to put away. Alive, forsooth! Why should he have left his home, have left his only child, if he was so good and loving? Was he guilty, think you, of any crime such as would leave him no choice but to abscond?'

'A crime! My father?'

There was such a sublimity of indignant faith in the girl's accents that I winced as though I had been struck.

'You have sought in vain,' I said. 'From my lips you may hear the truth. Yes, your father is dead. He died twelve years ago. I was at the burial.'

There must have been something solemn in my tone, as with my daughter by my

side, and my gaze fixed on the ice-hole, I set her doubts at rest. She moaned and shuddered, and so did I. For in a wild procession of dusky wraiths, who laughed and gibbered as they swept fleeting across the plain of snow, I saw the frightful years and their events ; and the last figure—the Present—was the most hideous of them all. Why had we not leapt together through the ice before Reason had caught us in her grip ? What a grim Present ! and what a gruesome Future did he show me in his mirror as he flew by ! Vow as I would that my first self was buried, with what persistency did its spectre refuse to be exorcised ! Betwixt my second self and Mildred lay the gulf which I had digged. If I attempted to bridge it, I should drag her to the bottom.

But it was clear that it must not be bridged. Those accents of pride told me that plainly ; and how pigheaded and besotted a dolt was I to suppose for a moment that it could be bridged ! I did not really suppose it ; but we cannot resist dallying sometimes with a yearning which we know, deep down within us, may never become fact. That

trouble undeserved should have darkened my darling's life as well as my own, did not tend to incline my mood to softness. Injustice—horrible injustice pervades the universe! Each fibre of my being howled the words aloud, and clamoured in deafening chorus at the feet of the Eternal.

Was this innocent child to be tossed into the lions' den, to be torn piecemeal by the beasts who had rent me—a strong man—in sunder? My mission was to plunge daggers in the hearts of those who presumed to be prosperous. The world had made of me a criminal—had branded me with the brand whose marks might never be effaced. Be it so. I would act as a criminal; in that should my vengeance lie.

But this child—was she to sink into the slough? I had prayed not. Yet I could not see—peer as I would after the flying phantoms—what other fate could lie in store for her. Destiny had willed that she should be goaded to leave home—alone, and in the night—to fling herself upon the tender mercies of the world of London. She was eminently handsome, tall and developed be-

yond her age—what would her certain fate be if she wandered forth into the streets?

On the other hand, I, her natural protector, had been by occult agency sent to her relief. What a relief! What cruel mockery! All I could do for the girl would be to drag her at once to the bottom of the chasm, which otherwise she would reach by stages. Jaggs and Spevins were fit companions for such as she! Ha, ha! She would probably, in course of time, become the bride of Spevins or one of the rest—a pretty prospect truly! How much better that here, under cover of the night, I should with my own hands plunge her into the ice-grave which she herself had made. Why should I shrink? My fingers were already stained with blood. It was the kindest thing that I could do for the felon's daughter.

Already she looked to me for protection. The man who had known her father—who had, he declared, been present at his burial—was surely the one to help the child in a moment of sore jeopardy. Help! With what a scoffing jar did the word twang upon my nerves! Where was I to take her to?

To Black Jack Alley—pending removal to the tavern. Well, at least I could promise that she would no more be beaten. I could not leave her in the snow; neither could I stay.

The red sun was forcing his face through the night-fog, turning to a ghastly hue the jaundiced lamps. It was time for the spectre to flit: we had parleyed already till the blood of both stood still.

‘You decide to live,’ I said, hurriedly. ‘How will you live? To whom will you go? Have you any money?’

A look of troubled amazement passed over the fair young face, as she answered simply:

‘When I came out I was intent upon going where none is required. I have no money, and no friends.’

‘I, too, am friendless,’ I returned. ‘Will you go with me? I dwell in a shameful quarter, whose existence should rain curses on the rich—in a place where starvation stalks abroad naked, where sorrow has her dwelling. If you elect to go with me till something can be done, you shall not starve, and you will be safe; but you may not be spared from

looking in the face of misery. In a day or two we will see what can be arranged. Do you dare to trust yourself with me ?

She searched my lineaments, and, smiling, placed a tiny hand in mine.

‘I look in your stern face,’ she murmured, ‘and in its haggard lines it wears the dignity of sorrow. For years I have been miserable myself—so I know how to grieve for the misery of others. Yes, I will trust myself with you—for my dead father’s sake.’

‘So be it ! For your dead father’s sake,’ I whispered solemnly ; and as we walked hand in hand together in the golden glow of dawn, my sight was blurred by unaccustomed tears.



CHAPTER V.

A STRUGGLE WITH AN INCUBUS.

BY the time we reached Tower Hill it was broad day, and, the momentary excitement passed which was bred of some hazy belief in mystic agency, I regretted the folly which had suggested my bringing Mildred to such a spot. In all London there was none more foul. Yet how could I have acted otherwise, being placed between the Scylla of the dark canal and the Charybdis of my squalid hiding-place? For the time being there was no other course than that I was pursuing. So soon as it was possible she must be removed, must be sent away to some more fitting home, leaving me to prepare for my new career. As we walked along in silence, hand in hand, I turned over

all this in my mind. For many reasons she must be got rid of. She must never have a suspicion of my relationship towards her, or else she would recoil from me ; and that was more than I felt called upon to bear. I gazed at the girl in the increasing light, and marked with misgiving her tall, rounded figure, her deep blue eyes, and profusion of fair hair. She must not be thrown into temptation as I had been. Whatever else I might come to have upon my conscience, it must never be said that I had led my own child into a vortex of crime. And that it was a vortex of crime into which I was preparing to plunge, I attempted in nowise to conceal from myself. The line I had chosen, wilfully, was one of the most base. Not only was I to sin myself, but the ruling idea of my existence was to be the decoying of others into sin. I was to place myself upon the level of the dishonest pawnbroker, the receiver of stolen goods, the practised 'fence.' Dragging my advantages in the mire, I was to employ all the arts which culture and education afforded me to seduce men less favoured mentally than I, to their undoing.

It was a dastardly line that I had deliberately selected, and, sore as I was, I gloried in its dastardliness. The more I degraded myself, the greater would the reproach be to those who had caused me to degrade myself.

By a distorted line of reasoning, I considered that the sins I should commit would lie at the door of others, that my blood would be on their heads, that the blackening of my own soul would go to the tarnishing of theirs. A thirst for vengeance had given me strength to live; had kept my brain from softening; had supplied my barren mind with food for contemplation. I was Cain, with the brand on my flesh of a lifelong punishment. Being hopelessly and utterly disgraced and beaten down, I was to fight—to stab in the dark—since I was too weak for open war.

Well! I was preparing myself to do as much harm as possible; was furbishing my wits for the timely detection of such pitfalls as might lead to too speedy detection; and when my time should arrive, which it was certain to do some day, I hoped to have the

satisfaction of reflecting that I had not wielded the lance in vain.

This was clear enough to be satisfactory to my mind. My determination was fixed, and I had no thought of changing it. But I felt an invincible repugnance, at which I marvelled, at the idea of my daughter assisting in the mission, even though she, too, had been hardly used. As I looked at her pale childish face—serene now that she considered herself protected—I kept repeating to myself, over and over again, that she must be consigned to cleaner hands than her unhappy father's. But where was she to go? To whose care could I consign her? With grim cynicism I looked around me, and acknowledged that my second self possessed no ally who did not wear the badge of criminal. And whose fault was that? Not mine. No, no! not mine!

Now and again it struck me that perchance her nature was stronger than my own. Until the moment when extreme anguish forged my soul anew, I was a creature of impulse; it did not seem thus with Mildred. She was evidently very proud; and, at a pinch, could

be determined probably. There was a twist which suggested energy about her ripe red lips, and a straightness of eyebrow which spoke of courage. Perhaps she might be able to resist temptation—might be able to live unsullied in the midst of murky surroundings—and yet, not so. She must be shielded from such a danger—must be placed in proper keeping ere she should come to know too much of me and my intentions. But how? Think as I would, and scheme as I would, I always returned to the same point. It was exasperating to feel so impotent, and I gnashed my teeth for very helplessness.

As we dived into a dark ill-smelling passage, I turned to see if she were frightened. No. With compressed lips she followed me with perfect trust, 'for her dead father's sake;' and as we threaded one foetid alley after another, picking a way among dusky knots of sprawling children, though her brow was contracted, her step never faltered.

In one greasy court, redolent of evil savours, whose entrance was well-nigh choked

by a baked-potato-van, we were assailed by gibes and hoots from a posse of *al-fresco* gamblers, who, squatting among stray lettuce-leaves and egg-shells, were whiling away the morning with games of dominoes, while a ring of excited backers betted halfpence. Street-boys of the horse-holding class they were, conspicuous for frowsy hair and greasy bandless hats, and clothes made for their great-grandfathers. They received us with a volley of quips and broad coarse jests; then, disappointed that we made no retort, returned to their all-engrossing play again. Mildred turned a trifle paler, and drew her cloak more close about her shoulders; but she followed me still—without a word.

By-and-by we reached Black Jack Alley, and paused on the threshold of the quaintly-constructed house wherein I dwelt, and Mildred looked up at it with a tinge of amused surprise. It was a peculiar house to look at, certainly. All kinds of ill-fitting doors opened by means of nailed straps, or bits of webbing (the handles had rotted off long since), upon all kinds of irregular steps—which steps had been designed by an artist

of superior ingenuity specially as snares, with the intent to trip you headlong ; while the doors seemed expressly designed to block each other up and prevent those who lived within from getting either in or out.

We floundered up to the second-floor, cautious as to traps in the way of clothes-lines stretched backwards and forwards across the stairs, and pushing my door open, I ushered Mildred in, and announced that for the present this was my home and hers ; and that the gentleman on his knees before the grate was my friend and neighbour.

The brawny young coalheaver—for it was he—rose to his feet, and a blush seemed to glow through the grime upon his visage as he stared, first at me, then at the newcomer. I was a mystery, quite beyond his homely power of unriddling ; one calculated to puzzle clearer brains than his. As time went on, the mysterious element rolled into a greater volume instead of diminishing. I had arrived in that dismal place with curiously short hair, which I forthwith allowed to sprout. I was not indigent, but had well-to-do allies, who brought good things and

feasted and caroused. I hardly ever went out by daylight, but prowled about in the night; and yet I had no weapons, never brought home spoil, wandered in an aimless fashion which pointed me out rather as a dreamer than a robber; and now I came home, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, bringing with me a young person who, though plainly attired, was evidently a lady. The worthy young fellow could not make it out. He stood first on one leg, then on the other, twisting in his dirty fingers a still dirtier cap; then remarked, clearing his throat, that the lady was welcome, he was sure, and plunging like a bull through the doorway, clattered down the wheezy stairs, reckless of life or limb, to announce to his womenfolk below this wonderful new event.

Mildred looked round with contracted lids, and, saying nothing, sat down upon a chair. I scrutinised her with an interest in which pain predominated; for I could not grow accustomed all at once to so marvellous a twirl as Fortune had just thought fit to give her wheel. Here was the being who to me in my great misery had been the only vision

of brightness—whom I had gilded with the refined gold of distant worship—brought down by one fell swoop to my own abject level, and accepting her changed state with calm.

Perchance she did not herself yet realise the change, for she was a child still, although demure beyond her age. To place blind faith in a stranger as she had done—to follow him without a murmur into so vile a slum—smacked of extreme innocence and ignorance of the world; or was she led to put faith in me by the occult power of the unsuspected bond? It might be so, for the firm mouth and straight eyebrow belied any suspicion of childish feebleness. Her cheek grew a shade more white as she sat, and her lips lost their ruddy tinge. Idiot that I was, with my schemings and surmises! The child had undergone an ordeal which had numbed her faculties; and the reaction was working now. She had, in the anguish of pride struggling against oppression, stood face to face with death, and love of life prevailing, she had broken down in the dread resolve.

Appalled at the isolation in which her rash

act had placed her, and repenting the wicked impulse which bade her cut the knot, I—world-worn, uncanny unreality—had appeared in the light of an angel, who, using the talisman of the parent's name, which was webbed round in her young mind with mystical romance, had bidden her, in a voice of authority derived from the Great Unknown, to follow. She had obeyed me as one in a mesmeric trance obeys the mesmerist—too glad to abdicate a right of volition that was fraught with unaccustomed peril—too wearied by an unequal fight which had borne down her fragile muscles. She had followed, trusting blindly to the new guide who spoke with such strange tenderness—whose voice struck chords of sweetness out of the forgotten past. She had followed—but, the haven reached, the tension of over wrought nerves relaxed—with a gasp like the fluttering of some little bird, she laid her head back and fainted.

Blaming myself angrily for my want of consideration, I hurried down the stairs and summoned the womenfolk of my friend the coalheaver, whose heads were all gathered in

a group, and who, full of wonder, were 'putting two and two together.' Thanks to Spevins and his charity, their room was no longer what it had been. The dear invalid was beyond human help when the Comforter, in guise of a burglar in furry head-gear, appeared upon the scene. He was gone! there was no help for that. But the bedding, which had been pawned, somehow took the place of the rotten straw; there was a fire in the grate; even a flower-pot upon the chimney-piece, wherein might be discerned a speck of green like a verdant worm, which in summer was to bloom into a geranium. Spevins, peculiar creature, was consistent even while seeming to contradict himself. This was only another phase of the 'remaking of Nature's slop-work,' which he looked on as the pleasurable duty of his career.

The womenfolk flocked upstairs with a flapping and clacking as of many ducks; gabbled of the sweetly-pretty dear with the lovely hair; placed the exhausted girl in my bed and tucked her up; hung an apron over the window to modulate the light; behaved with the unselfish gentleness of stricken

creatures ; and creaking down again to where I waited, set my mind at ease by declaring that the lady was only tired. They made bold to drop a hint or two ; to try a furtive question, skilfully concealed under a casual remark ; but I put a stop to that at once, and they were fain to bottle their curiosity. Then, swearing them by awful oaths to watch her sleep and tend her waking, I sallied forth to wander about the byways and settle something in my addled head as to what had better be done next.

No respectable friends—not one. Had Fortune turned about her wheel in this outrageous and unexpected fashion, just to show me what an awkward thing it was to have no friends but thieves and housebreakers ? What was to be done ? where could I go ? In my perplexity I almost felt inclined to throw aside the veil which wrapped me—to toss up the sponge—and, seeking out some Prisoners' Aid Society, to implore them to find protection for the homeless girl. Then I reflected upon what prisoners of every grade had told me of their sad experience of those societies. No tangible assistance

could be hoped from that quarter ; or indeed from any quarter. It was despairing, nothing more nor less. The only thing for me to do was to bide my time ; to wait and see what Fortune would do next.

What would Jaggs think of it — and Spevins ? We were tied together by the compact for our commonweal. I had not seen them for some time past. They surely would not be pleased with my incumbrance. Heavens ! into what companionship should I be compelled by circumstance to introduce my darling. How could I help it ? As I pondered I ground my teeth, for the devils whispered that she at least had done no wrong—even unconsciously as I had—but that for all that she was doomed to be lost as I was. Her plight should surely steel me to doughty deeds, rather than cause me to break the compact. Heaven was as cruel and as pitiless as man, to others as well as to me. My task of vengeance was in its way a holy one. I shook my fist at the smoky strip which showed 'twixt overhanging eaves, and dully gave the matter up. I could not solve the enigma of life's trials, and would

try no more. With burning eagerness did the avenger pant for the dawning of the day when this weariful noviciate should cease, and implacable warfare commence.

It seemed possible that Mildred would be forced to dwell amongst us. Fate wills strange things at times. It was evident that for the present there was no alternative. I must see to her comfort therefore as far as I was able; and to that end abandoned my crazy room to her, procuring for my own use a garret in the gable.

She must not be permitted to mope either, as she would do if mewed up in that close, dingy chamber. Morbidly anxious for her welfare, I was delivered of the brilliant notion that, situated as she was, it would do her no harm to see a little life, provided that her ears were not assailed by blasphemies or improper conversation. I got the serenaders up and made them perform, warning them beforehand that they must cull only the choicest flowers from their bouquet. Somehow they failed to amuse the child after the first few minutes. She looked at them in a wan, scared manner, which fairly checked

their poor attempts at mirth ; and Bones gave it up at last, declaring that unless Missy would be obliging enough to smile now and then for a change, it was no go.

‘ We’ve often had bad audiences,’ he complained, ‘ but never nuffin’ so blank as that. Lugubrious expressions is damping to the cheerfullest of minstrels. I’d rather stand in an east wind, any day, and sing touching ditties through the chink of a gin-palace door, while selfish coves drink gin-hot, and don’t give no coppers to the musicians—and Lord knows that’s ’eart-breaking enough !’

The serenaders did not answer, so they were cashiered. I bethought me that we would dine each day at a snug, one-eyed hostelry hard by, where respectable poverty thought fit to eat its meals. This hostelry (a lively and engaging place) stood close round the corner, and made known its line of business by means of a modest tea-cup and a humble coffee-pot, placed each in a window in front of a muslin blind. Beside these suggestive items of homely ware was pinned a list of viands, fly-blown and stained by the dusty footprints of Time, wherein the im-

pecunious cit might read that a good dinner was to be procured for six portraits of the queen in bronze. This obliging eating-house could boast, in addition to other advantages, of the inestimable boon of a gridiron, that precious possession being typified over the portal by a weak-backed effigy which bore traces of having once been gilt. The gridiron, suspended over the portal, did not merely imply that the luxury of a square of iron bars was amongst the penates of the establishment; but suggested also—and this was more important—that a fire roared daily at one o'clock, over which gentlemen and ladies were at liberty to toast their own meat, being supplied as well with knife and fork and plate and cup of tea, for the trivial sum of twopence halfpenny. Beer being licensed to be retailed on the premises, gentlemen might even, should they think proper, imbibe that exhilarating fluid instead of tea. Moreover, so anxious was the proprietor of the hostelry to oblige those who were his patrons, that unwise virgins whose wants were not provided for beforehand were informed that they might obtain ready-cooked liver and bacon for four-

pence, vegetables or pudding for a penny ; and last, not least, that accounts might be settled weekly—a very important inducement this. But the very poor are suspicious of too tempting offers. Therefore I regret to say that the mass of ladies and gentlemen in the neighbourhood, who were happy possessors of pennies, doubting the ingenuousness of such too accommodating amiability, preferred as a rule to purchase their food by weight, and to grill it under their own personal superintendence. Having cooked their food, they were in the habit of retiring in shirt-sleeves to consume the result of their labours in a gloomy, ramshackle building at the back—with no prospect but a brick-bat garden and leaky waterpipe—under the auspices of a savage-looking waitress, who, considering herself clothed with darkness as with a garment, lamentably neglected the adornments to which her sex is supposed to be prone. More trusting patrons, on the other hand, rolled daily in through the swing-door, groped their way to the tottering clothless table, and devoured all that the waitress thought fit to put before them, paying off

their score each Saturday on receipt of their weekly wage. These reckless plutocrats, however, were few, being for the most part dock-labourers, who had no family to support. As to those who were less fortunate, and who had the further ill-luck to be 'down,' we know their fate too well; and I judged it wise to lead Mildred to look upon the brightest side of the dismal rookery wherein we had our nest.

But even this amusement did not entertain my child any more than did the serenaders. She shrank from the rough people and their rough talk, and I could see that she pined in the new atmosphere, though she did her best to hide it from me. There was something brewing in that pretty head. She observed me from under her long lashes when she deemed me busy with my book, and when I met her eye, opened her mouth as if to speak, then, sighing, held her peace, and in silence stitched at the needle-work which she had begged me to procure for her.

For my own part, I studied her as furtively, and tossed on my mattress under the tiles

in vain attempts at sleep, revolving and marvelling—marvelling and revolving—whatever could have possessed the fickle goddess to treat me and mine so scurvily? I guessed that, being sharp-witted, my anomalous position would surprise her, even more than it did my friend the coalheaver. I felt certain that she pondered over it by day—possibly dreamed of it by night; was becoming, with returning calm, more desirous of acquiring knowledge to which she should be a stranger, and that a moment would come more or less speedily when the spirit of Eve would possess her daughter and impel her to eat the apple. To avoid this as long as might be, I bent all my energies. The situation was a false one; none could be more aware of that than I.

False situations cannot remain *in statu quo* for long. Unless taken in hand with uncompromising resolve, and killed instead of scotched, the single snake develops spontaneously into a nest whose contents increase in number at compound interest with every hour, till we see that there is no use trying to annihilate the breed, and so let them

have their way. Such a situation as my daughter's and mine was clearly untenable. I knew the secret ; she did not. My voice betrayed itself now and then in a way which, not possessing the key, could only fill her with surprise. I was lashed at moments by what the French call an *élan* (a word more rife with meaning than our word *impulse*) ; and she, amazed and perplexed, awaited an account of her cherished father's death and burial, which never was forthcoming. 'Why,' she evidently argued, 'should this secretive individual have volunteered hints about my father, have admitted that he was present at the funeral, if—once located with him—he is mum? For my dead father's sake, he said, he brought me here. How provoking of him, then, to keep his lips hermetically sealed.'

Mildred was on tenter-hooks ; awaiting a confidence which never came. Knowing, as I did, what passed within her mind, I was guilty and confused, which only helped to make matters worse.

Just consider how bizarre was our position. Excitement passed, she was shrewd enough,

despite inexperience, to know that a young lady, born and bred, could not take up her abode for long in the slimiest of slums, as the adopted daughter of a mysterious creature whose only object, having lured her thither, seemed to be to let things slide. And such a creature! One who wandered aimlessly, with fists in pockets, talking to himself; who, racked by accesses of emotion, gnawed his nails and glowered at her; who, when she strove gently to delve into his past (she having told her own), jumped up with muttered imprecations, and flinging wide the door, sallied forth, nor returned for hours. My apparently unruddered conduct was sufficient to fill her with apprehension. I would not speak, and would not let her put questions. Verily, the new existence was so bleak and smileless as to suggest to her mind that a stepfather's blows—a sleeping-place in a canal—were preferable to it. In how awkward a situation were we both placed. The longer we lingered in our false position, the greater grew the difficulty of escape. I knew all this, and yet, while I deplored that it should be so, I could not but feel keenly

the delicious wrongfulness of snatching a brief measure of my child's society; and even caught myself longing that she might not be torn from my arms, at the same time that I was most anxious to get rid of her.

How long a condition of things so harrowing to both would have lasted, it is impossible to conjecture; a crisis was brought about one afternoon by the advent of Jaggs and Spevins.

Mildred was standing in the corner of the chamber in which she slept at night, and which I occupied with her by day; and the window being of the smallest (two panes, one mended with paper), and the day waning, our visitors were unaware for a moment of her presence.

Bouncing up the stairs in immense spirits, while his genteel companion followed with more stately tread, Spevins dashed into the room, and indulged in a *pas seul*. 'Rich and rare were the togs he wore!' he sang as he poussetted around the table, and a 'bran-new box on each clump he bore!' How are you gitting on, my noble captain? How are you gitting on all this while? Let's look at

yer. Why, ye're gitting on toppin'—blest if I should have know'd yer! There's summat different, let alone the mustard and cress—don't ye see, Jaggs?—there's summat altered like there was in the quarry that time—don't you remember?—when he used to look so awful savage, and all at once became content. Ain't it a speakin' physog? Summat's happened—what is it? I'm blowed if you ain't like the animile as changes all manner of colours, as my eye does when it's blackened. Well! you'll nearly do now—time's a'most up—quarantine's done, and here's your bill of health. Prepare to receive cavalry! Hoopla! So saying, he struck an attitude of mock pomp, and handing me a parcel, signified in pantomime that I was to open it.

'New togs for you, old man, to appear in the world in. They're from a West-end tailor—the slappest things out. A pair of stunnin' kicksies—fit for the Prince of Wales—a gum-stretcher, three neckties, and a dozen paper collars. Who says as I ain't a proper pal?'

I picked up a frock-coat and a pair of trousers from the floor, and threw them on the bed, while Mildred stared with all her eyes.

The day-dream would be over in a minute—her quick intelligence would have food to work upon. If she did not learn all, she would learn sufficient to warrant the hazard of a guess. What then? What would she do or think? Would she suspect that I was a member of a secret gang, and that she had been lured hither to be trained for a decoy? Oh, horror! Why did I not invent some tale while it was easy? The imperceptible wall was rising. Though dwelling under the same roof, we were further apart—much further than when she was grieving over the departed, whilst I was doing my labours in the quarry. Yet what story could I have invented which she, with those truthful eyes, would not instantly have recognised as falsehood? The real story of the future I might not tell, for it was not my own secret. It appertained as much to Jaggs or Spevins as to myself; nay, more to Spevins than to either of us, for its germ had sprung from his nimble brain. Well, suspense would be over soon; and none would be more glad than I. She would learn the truth, and surprise me. But it was not to be yet.

Before saying anything that was compromising, Spevins and Jaggs both perceived the presence of a stranger at the same moment, and looked from me to her and back again as though to request an introduction.

‘A young lady—a friend of mine who is stopping here,’ I stammered with embarrassment. It stuck in my throat to have to present my Mildred to a pair of irreclaimable gaol-birds.

There was a pause, which seemed an age. Spevins looked at Jaggs, closing one eye, and whistled ; Jaggs placed one supple finger along his nose, and coughed.

I turned hot and cold, and flushing up with rage, cried out : ‘What brutes you are ! This is an innocent child whom I saved from suicide, and who is living here till she can find work—that’s all. Nothing so wonderful in that, I suppose ?’

‘Is she to be the barmaid of the new pub ?’ scoffed Spevins, who, whilst nettled, was amused by my unnecessary heat.

‘She’ll make a first-rate one to draw ale for the butlers,’ acquiesced Jaggs, surveying the girl with approval, as he might a horse’s

points, whilst she, clothed in quiet dignity, moved forward into the light.

‘Take care, Jaggs!’ I cried, doubling my fist unconsciously, while my eyes glared. ‘Say what you like to me, but take care how you presume to insult this lady. If you dare to look at her like that, it’ll be the worse for you. She is here in the light of a daughter. Remember what I once did—remember the L upon my arm! If you are wise, you will not goad me to do such a deed again.’

‘Hoity-toity!’ sneered Jaggs, prudently retiring out of reach behind his companion. ‘A cat may look at a king, I’ve heard. But the gentleman lag has got hold of a bit of muslin, and we mustn’t so much as look at her. Ho-ho! that’s a good un—rayther!’

This was a bad beginning. I knew I was a fool to act as I did, but the old devil surged up within me, and I was wild with indignation. By a prodigious effort I mastered myself, and gulped down my emotion. How should I improve Mildred’s position by angering these men?

‘Don’t be an ass, Jaggs!’ I retorted. ‘I

didn't mean to wound you, but I won't stand nonsense, you know. I only meant that you were to remember that this child is innocent—has seen little of the world—least of all, our world—and that, being unused to that sort of thing, you should be cautious.'

'She's not to be in the swim, then?' Jaggs demanded sulkily. 'It's a mussy you don't want to crawl out of the contract. Pah! I don't care about innocence myself—rayther out of place—no more should the likes of you, I'm thinking.'

I winced at being spoken to thus before her very face. The thong ate into my flesh and curled round my writhing limbs; but I kept my temper, though I could see in the glass that I was livid as marble.

So was Mildred, deadly pale; her blue eyes seemed to deepen into violet by contrast with her cheek. Her serene brow was knitted with intense curiosity.

Good-humoured Spevins strove to clear the thunder from the air.

If I liked to pick up stray gals, he had no objection, he averred; but I must remember that the morals of Mayfair were immaculate,

and grooms of the chamber fastidious and decorous. The young lady here present was a sweet creature, as pure as snow, no doubt, such as did honour to my artistic taste; and if I chose to adopt her, it was romantic and high-flown, and all that. He would just hint, however, that we were not J.P.s as yet, nor millionaires, and that, until we were, it would be well for me to restrain the exuberance of my affection for human nature. A dog or a parrot, now, are cheaper to keep. Talking of Mayfair, he had news for me, he said. The landlord of the public-house was to give up his keys on that day month, and it would be necessary for me to meet him by appointment very shortly, in order that I might be put up to wrinkles with regard to his special business. Would I don the new kicksies and the gumstretcher on the morrow, and present myself in the aforementioned aristocratic neighbourhood? My appearance was so altered that I need not fear being recognised. I should want a new tile and a pair of gloves to finish me off; here was a five-pound note for present necessities, of which I was to make the most, and

not spend more than I could help on my new plaything.

With this, and a promise to call again to-morrow, he and Jaggs departed, and Mildred resumed her needle-work, her brow still fretted with a frown.

I pocketed the note and pretended to read. If only I had the courage to speak ! But my mouth was dry as parchment, and I was afraid of the sound of my voice. What was it that was working in that little head ? Had she comprehended the gist of those two men's remarks ? and if she had, what did she purpose doing ? I held my tongue, and so did she. We threw sidelong glances at one another now and again, and then looked down. The situation was intolerable. Those blue eyes of hers were like burning-glasses. I put on my new clothes, and escaped into the streets.

‘What could she think of me now ?’ I kept asking myself, with inward groaning. But after all it didn't matter, since she was never to know of the bond which ought to have united us. ‘I don't care about innocence ; no more should the likes of you.’ Did she

realise what Jaggs meant by that? How frightful it would be if she were to decline to sit down at the same table with me; to recoil from her father as from an unclean thing; to upbraid me for having stood 'twixt her and the long sleep; to fling at me words of scathing abhorrence! The wounds would not be less deep because the barbs were hurled unwittingly. And if she did upbraid her unhappy parent, she would be fully justified in doing so. Unless I were able to provide an endurable future on this globe, I surely had no right to prevent her from leaving it. For myself—unfettered by ties of family or name—I was free to choose my own road. But I was surely wrong to have snatched the young girl from the grave, to share with me the future which alone was mine to offer. The yearning which bade me keep the damsel by my side was (looking at it from the least guilty aspect) culpable weakness. Those who ride forth to fight Apollyon do not carry young ladies on a pillion.

The more I paced the streets, the more plainly did I see that there was but one way

out of the difficulty. Of course I could never breathe a hint of who I was. The scorn with which she tossed her pretty head, when I had suggested that her errant parent might have fallen into crime, was sufficient warning. It was incumbent upon me to go back without delay, and summon courage to speak out openly as far as regarded herself. The preposterous hope that was rising in my bosom must be torn up by the roots. It was my duty to point out to one so inexperienced and guileless that I was a pariah, an outcast, no matter what, and implore forgiveness for having, even for an instant, thrown her into such companionship as that of Jaggs and Spevins—my sworn comrades. It was my duty to entreat my darling—on bended knees, if need were—to return home to where her mother was—to bear Mr. Trevelyan's cruelty—anything—rather than remain in proximity to one who was accursed; who was under a ban; a loathsome leper, struck with a disease infectious and deadly. When duty calls it is not always easy to obey. Several times I turned round and made a step or two towards Black-Jack

Alley; several times my resolution failed, and I turned back again.

How I hated myself when I realised how flaccid was grown my will! That which I was called upon to do, could not be done. Could not? It must, and straightway, at any personal risk; or who might tell what evil might not come of it? When I did at last muster courage to sneak home, Mildred was on the tip-toe of expectation. The daughter of Eve was waiting to hear something of my comrades. I could only hang my head. We were at cross-purposes, as usual. Blushing with shame, I whispered inwardly for comfort: 'In a few days! only a few days more!' and as the lines of wounded pride started out upon my daughter's forehead, the brow of the would-be avenger was abased in the dust. I groaned in spirit as I beheld the haughty curves about her mouth and nose; and writhed when she murmured questions of her father's burial—spreading delicate feelers to induce me to speak out.

Oh, those innocent shafts! How they wounded me! She imagined that if I could

be got to talk of the mysteriously departed, it would be best for both ; for not only would she learn that which she longed to know, but it would be very odd if, in the recital, I did not drop something of my own past which should help to mow down the thicket which was springing up 'twixt herself and her preserver. From her point of view she was right ; and so was I from mine, when I turned her weapon and evaded any mention of the subject. Is it to be wondered at that Mildred should have become cold ; that, outraged by the anomaly of our relations, she should have tossed her head and retired altogether within herself ?

Extremely sensitive to word or sign on her part, I perceived with a pang, as days passed on, that my daughter, the apple of my eye, avoided me ; that she managed to find occupation elsewhere at times when I was used to expect a welcome to our humble room, and I, in my turn, felt wounded. After all, supposing that she was racked by suspicions of what I and my comrades were, did she not owe me some scant courtesy at least for having held out a hand to her in

her utmost need? Given that she was not to die, I had saved her from the streets. Though there was a Bluebeard's chamber whose threshold might not be passed, I had treated her as a slave his mistress—as a swain his goddess—with a punctilious and delicate respect which should have won from her some gratitude. But no. She pined and languished in her squalid cage, with reproachful head tossed at him who placed her there; behaved to me, who had saved her from unknown perils, with studied coldness; was not the least grateful for the little I was able to do; wished herself possibly in the water, where, but for my interference, she might have been lying after all.

Mildred's reserved demeanour and pinched lips were as distressing to me as my reticence was to her. If in me she scented and abhorred the criminal, why not have said so openly? If she only would have spoken out, I could have spoken too, and knowing what it was that she suspected, have placed myself, possibly, in a less unfavourable light. And yet all the time I knew perfectly well that with me as the elder, and also the suspected

person, lay the onus of explanation. I knew it, but my lips were hermetically glued together for all that. It was as though a malign spell, which it was hopeless to resist, had been cast over us; as if some wicked fairy had determined to erect an impassable barrier between the two melancholy waifs who should have loved and consoled each other. And when I discerned how effectively the work was being done, I gave way to quiet cachinnations—a rattle of grim laughter like the hammering of nails into a coffin. Much had I, the ticket-of-leave man, the murderer, to do with love or consolation! I must really be growing half-witted to consider such things, even in day-dreams. Love, consolation, gratitude. Images of heavenly tenderness which could have no niche above my hearth, no home in my empty breast. It was in the order of things, I said approvingly to myself, that Mildred should be hard and ungrateful; that she should be indifferent to her stricken parent, should not feel herself drawn to him over whose imaginary tomb she wove mystic garlands of romance. Had not the whip of Fate flayed me for years

with its many thongs? It was proper that the treatment of the pariah should be consistent. Well! things were about to square themselves. The whip had swept my shoulders hourly for longer than it was pleasing to remember. In a few days—only a few days now—I should be able to pass on the blows, stripe by stripe, summoning weal for weal.

To others Mildred could be kind, and that made the matter worse. The wretched creatures who swarmed and starved in our miserable tenement adored her. She fitted in and out amongst their sick with words of soothing and encouragement, like the sun-beam she resembled as a babe; busied herself with cunning condiments for their behoof with a feverish earnestness which betrayed a mind ill at ease.

‘This cannot go on,’ I whispered to myself with dim foreboding. ‘What will happen next—what will happen next? How long will she maintain this unnatural demeanour? What will be the next step? She is proud, also impulsive as I used to be, else would she not have tried to drown herself. Some day she will run away. Whither will she go and

what will be her fate? How can I prevent a catastrophe, possessing no hold on her affections? As possible pictures presented themselves on my mind's retina, each one more dreadful than the other, I shuddered, and seized my courage with all my strength at last. 'I swear that an end shall be put to this at once!' I cried aloud, as I threaded the thronged thoroughfares. 'I'll write to her mother anonymously. Yes, that's it—telling her where her daughter is; and meanwhile, abscond myself.' Then, as I reflected that I was returning my darling to a home where she would be ill-used, her tender flesh bruised and beaten, I became tempest-tossed again, and murmured, 'Why have I not an honest friend? Not an honest friend on the broad earth—not one—it is too cruel!'

I had unconsciously been wandering round the purlieus about the Tower, up and down the streets of Wapping, and stood now for a moment with folded arms upon the landing-stage whence passengers embark for Belgium. The last time I had stood there was just before I went into retirement—when I was supposed to have gone abroad to avoid re-

porting myself to the police. Six months had passed since then, and I asked myself now, in my dreamy fashion, what effect liberty had had upon my character? Was my nature softened? No. I felt with satisfaction that it was not. Reflection and solitude and recent events had tempered the steel—that was all; had made it colder, more sharp and pointed. There was some cause for rejoicing in that. I was very glad—yes, very glad—and, my mind made up now with regard to Mildred, I was moving slowly homeward when a hand was laid on my shoulder and some one said:

‘A friend, messmate! Didn’t I say I’d stand your friend? Avast there—I know your voice, though you’ve repainted your figurehead. I heard you were gone to furrin’ parts. Just come back, eh?’

The tone of those accents was like a whiff across the moors from Princetown. I started and beheld the good-natured, weatherbeaten face of Scarraweg—a grin on his wooden lineaments, which seemed to give an extra curl to his moth-eaten old Newgate frill.

A friend who was an honest man : never was desire more speedily gratified ! Why had I never thought of the kind chief-warder—the one honest friend to whom the pariah might look ? I, as well as Mildred, could be ungrateful. With an eagerness which gave the old man pleasure, I grasped his hand. I was glad to see him—I could not say how glad. Would he do me a favour—a great favour ? Of course he would. At Dartmoor he had done me many a good turn. The sight of his old face was like a glimpse of the breezy sea.

Scarraweg laughed slyly, and took my arm.

‘ It’s astonishing,’ he grunted, ‘ how glad people are to see us when they want something. Inside the prison folks ain’t so pleased to see me. Howsomdever, I’m at your service, messmate. What can I do for you ?’

We strolled down Wapping High Street, entered a tavern over whose bar another salt presided who was a counterpart of the chief-warder, and, retiring to a back parlour, called for something to drink. Meanwhile the experienced eye of my companion had been

examining my outer man, and the result of the survey seemed hardly satisfactory.

‘Gone to the bad, I’ll swear! Too great a swell,’ he grumbled. ‘But perhaps I wrong you. You always was mysterious. Your friends came forward, no doubt; and yet that can’t be neither, for didn’t I hear you telling the winds just now that you hadn’t a friend on the earth? Them clothes ain’t of the prison make, nor yet from the slopshop—they’re West-enders, and expensive. How did you come by ’em? Don’t say they’re stole! I can read signals without a glass as well as any. Ah well! here’s better luck to both of us. Never say die! What can I do for *you*?’

My sudden gladness had had time to ooze away. On the whole, the rencontre was awkward—decidedly awkward, for it showed that the change in my appearance was not so complete as I had supposed (or was it only my voice that had betrayed me?), and it was on the cards that the gimlet optic of the ‘factory’ in Scotland Yard might penetrate, even in Mayfair, the thin film of my disguise. All the more reason to persist in my

resolution as to Mildred. So far as Scarraweg went, I knew that there was nought to fear. He was incorruptible—a clock wound up by Government to strike at given moments when engaged on his duties at Dartmoor; but he was not one to play the spy—to betray secrets told in confidence outside his special functions. I knew that I could speak plainly to the old sailor, and that though what I said might put him in a tantrum, he would never whisper a word of it to another; and so, with both elbows upon the table and a glass of stiff grog by my side, I made up my mind to tell him all.

‘Thank you for your goodness, sir,’ I began. ‘You can’t do anything for *me*. I’m past doing anything for. Mayhap a knock on the head is the greatest kindness anyone could do me.’

‘It’s as I suspected then—gone to the bad! And a sharp, clever chap like you, too. Haven’t you had enough of skilley and short-commons? A man of the world ought surely to know that honesty in the long-run is the best policy.’

‘That’s not my experience,’ I retorted

with bitterness. 'The prison brand is on me. My case is hopeless, not through my fault. You gentlemen chose to recast me in a mould of your own fancy. Very well. I've taken the new shape, and hope you like it.'

'Oh!' growled Scarraweg, drumming his fingers in annoyance, 'I did think *you* were above that claptrap. Every prisoner is as sure to say he's a ground-down sufferer as that he's innocent. Convicts ought to suffer, oughtn't they? I'd string 'em up by dozens to the yard-arm—that's the only thing for 'em. *Damn* 'em, they're incorrigible! It's disgusting!'

I could not help smiling at the gusto with which my old protector rapped out his oath. Now that he was out of the way of rules and regulations, it was a comfort to swear, and he availed himself of the privilege.

'You say I am a mystery,' I went on, 'because I never received letters or saw relations—because I was a cork upon the waters—because at first I was morose and desperate, then all at once became a pattern. Listen, and judge for yourself.'

Then, beginning at the beginning, I told him my tale—of how through one instant's madness I had placed myself under the ban for life ; of how I had been denied the mercy of the rope, to be thrust into a den of reprobates ; of how I had struggled and moaned and finally succumbed ; and of how I had come at last to glory in my infamy. 'My future career is fixed,' I concluded, walking up and down, my chin upon my breast, lashed into agitation by the picture I had drawn.

'Don't tell me what it is, for the Lord's sake !' cried out the chief-warder, almost as moved as I. 'Poor chap ! You certainly were more sinned against than sinning. Who are we that we should brand a fellow-man for life for an unpremeditated act of frenzy ? Though we've let you get out, you are none the less irrevocably branded ; I confess your case was very hard ; but it will be better now for those in a plight like yours. Thank God for the silent system—it's working wonders.'

'You know in your heart that that's a lie !' I retorted. 'Don't play the humbug. You know that until men are classed with

fine discrimination, your silent system is a fraud. The habitual criminal your system doesn't touch. Well, I admit that nothing can touch him—he is not to be reformed; all you can do is to muzzle him, and there's no denying that you do that well enough. But as for reformation—fudge! there's no such thing. Despair, recklessness, bad example, ruin—for the incorrigibles alone keep up their spirits, and so become objects of envy to the despairing—all fight together against reform. I went into prison heart-broken but not vicious, and might have faded harmlessly away; but the tempter was there, placed at my elbow by yourselves. More merciful than you, he encouraged in me a thirst for revenge, which saved me from going mad, and gave to my riven life an object. I tell you plainly that I shall fight so long as I am able. Sooner or later I shall return to your care at Dartmoor, or go to Chatham or to Portland, and die a convict unless some gracious hand gives me first that knock upon the head. There's no use arguing, so you may save your breath. I am a brilliant example of the working of your vaunted

system upon a refined nature ; your fist beats as heavily on our silver wires as on a drum, and you wonder that your clumsy banging wins no music from the one while it shatters the other. When will you learn that we are entirely different instruments—that to draw music from such as I we must be handled daintily, while to make an impression upon the coarser kind they must be banged ? Keep your kettledrum in one place, and your zither in another. Till you do that, your preaching is idle wind ; your blundering attempts at reformation no more than the completest mockery.'

The old man blinked at me as I warmed with my subject, keeping on an undercurrent of growling, and scratching the tip of his nose, as his way was when vexed. He did not know what to say, because in the innermost temple of his being where Truth is enshrined, that deity was telling him that what I said was true. He knew it, and agreed with me, but was annoyed none the less that I, a ticket-of-leave man, should place my finger on a weak point of the famous system with such ease. The diatribes of the

Reverend Tilgoe had annoyed him because they were fabrications founded on small grains of distorted fact. My arguments vexed him still more because he could not answer them, and deplored a display of his weakness before one who had been his serf. So, like a wise man, he changed his ground, and ringing for more drink, said :

‘I don’t think, messmate, that we’re here to discuss the system. You ask me to do you a favour, and tell me at the same time that your case is hopeless. Which is it? If a man’s case is hopeless, what’s the good of a favour? I’d do more for you than most people, for, dear heart alive, you’ve had an undue share of kicks, and I’d be woundily sorry if you came back to us.’

Then, sitting down again and calming myself, I told him about Mildred; and as I proceeded, his eyes goggled wider, while his encircling frill of beard seemed to stand erect about his chin till he looked like a grizzled porcupine.

‘What!’ he cried, when I had done. ‘You want me to take her away, when I can see God’s finger in it all as plain as the sun at

noon ! So long as she's there, man, you don't dare go wrong. Take her away in order that you may batter your head against the bricks ? Not if I know it. I won't, that's flat.'

His heavy palm fell with a loud smack upon the table, and he looked as though not all the king's horses or all the king's men could move him from that firm resolve.

I got up and, smiling faintly, bowed.

'Then I waste my time and yours,' I rejoined. 'I thought you'd find pleasure in saving an innocent child from ruin. You don't. I'm wrong, so pardon me ; she'll come to be a thief's decoy, and go in for a lagging on her own account. The girl is on the horns of a dilemma. Either she will follow my fortunes, which must end in her undoing, or else she will run away from me and be thrown upon the streets, or else I must return her to her mother's keeping. You know what that resulted in before. Already, suspecting something that isn't right, she pines and droops. Her eyes turn from me in aversion. She won't follow me, I think. No ; she'll make another plunge, and her fate will be the streets, and she'll have you

to thank for that, for you alone could save her. If you do not, and her fame comes to be blasted, all I have to say is, that I'd rather not have the remorse which will be your just portion.'

The old gentleman was nonplussed, and rubbed his nose as if about to give way to a serious outbreak of testiness. He said no more to me, but growled and grumbled to himself, for he could read plainly in my face that my mind was made up, and, now that I had given him the key of the change which came over me at Dartmoor, he had cause to be aware that, when I had made up my mind, I was not easily to be shaken.

Motioning me not to go away, he fixed his attention upon his grog, whilst his eyes remained glued on me, and he raised the beaker by degrees as the liquor gurgled down his throat, till through the bottom of the glass I could discern the eyes still staring like two prodigious oysters with red-hot rims, and I quietly returned the stare.

The last gulp or so jogged his intellect, for his brow cleared, and he discussed the matter further.

So the girl had no affection for me? Not the slightest? That was singular. Yet how should she, if I was so cold and repellent? If I had coaxed and petted her, now, she might have come to like her protector, even though he dwelt in a grimy hovel. Why had I not coaxed and petted the wayward child?

‘At least I had strength to avoid that,’ I replied, with a tremor in my voice which did not escape the chief-warder. God forbid that she should come to like me! That would only entangle us irreparably in the meshes. And yet, was it not a gruesome destiny which had brought father and child face to face, only to show that they must remain strangers? Of course it was better as it was, though cruel to one of the twain, for it would never do for the girl to learn the secret. She must go on to the end in ignorance, burning incense before the unknown altar, throwing chaplets upon the imaginary tomb. Whatever came to pass she must never suspect the truth, never know that she was a felon’s daughter, for the ignominy of that would kill her. For my

part I must rest content in that I had seen her, that we had dwelt together for a while, breathing the same air—that I had been allowed to kiss her cloak, her simple garments, when she was out of sight. Yes! if only she were far away and safe I should be content, perfectly content, and ask no further favour either of God or man.

Scarraweg grinned and shook his mane, whilst staring still.

‘I was deceiving myself,’ he snorted. ‘We can all talk of the masthead while standing on the deck—ay, and keep our sea-legs pretty well, too. But if we are despatched there, many of us will turn giddy, and implore to be let off the job. You know, and so do I, that now you’ve got her you don’t mean to part with the lass,’ he declared, with conviction. ‘Maybe she’s a bit frightened at your stern face, and queer, self-contained manners. Some day, sitting cosily by the fireside, you’ll blurt out who you are; and then there’ll be a good cry and lots of hugging, and after that it’ll all be jolly. Send her away? Not you! You think you would? I’ll show you that you wouldn’t.’

Come! I take you at your word. What took me down to the docks to-day was to inquire about the sailing of the ships. There's a first cousin of mine who, with her husband and two children, is going to Canada to settle. That's why I'm here on leave. She'd do me a kindness, I know. Shall I propose that she takes your girl? You say she'd be as glad to escape as you to let her go? Here's a chance, now. My cousin's a soft-hearted body, who'd be a second mother to her. In Canada she would be safe from her persecutors, and could start afresh. You could go your own rigs, too, without bothering your head any more about the unfortunate young lady, because you'd never set eyes on her any more. Come, now! Is it a bargain? You'll have to promise not to write to or to communicate with her.'

I met the old man's gimlet-gaze without blenching. He didn't know me yet. I had passed through my tussle, and it was over. Peradventure, had she been more kind, the struggle would have been more severe. But her own demeanour had shown me plainly that it was necessary for us to part. I was

used, too, to the acceptance of unpleasant situations. I had long since abandoned all idea of the world containing for me the smallest draught untinctured by gall. The temporary weakness was over. With no tremor now in my voice, I could grasp the old man's hand, and thank him as the saviour of my darling.

Scarraweg was disconcerted. It was clear I was not feigning. Plucking up courage, after an instant's indecision, he made another attempt.

'Come, come, Ebenezer,' he whispered, in a wheedling tone, still holding my hand in his. 'Come! for her sake be sensible. You think you wish it now, but you'll be sorry when she's gone; and I can only do this, mind, on the condition that you never meet again. Why, because you were a convict once, are you to wear the dress again? I'm sure it isn't a pretty one. That you're in bad hands I can see by those smart duds of yours. Here's an idea. Let me take a passage for you as well. Why shouldn't you, too, start afresh along with her? Here, I grant, it may not be easy to shake off old pals; and you, from denying your own

identity, have no one to help you. I'm a poor man, or I wouldn't be chief-warder of that ghastly hole that you know of; but I'm careful, and have put by a pound or two. 'Tain't much. But there, take it, and go with her. It'll keep you straight till you get employment. Some day, when you can, you shall pay me back. Is it a bargain ?

The good old fellow quite blushed as he made the proposal, in a bungling way, and, regardless of consequences, called loudly for more drink to conceal his confusion. I felt keenly how kind he was, but the extent of the unselfish kindness only made my spirit the more envenomed. Of what use was proffered assistance when the die was cast ? What was this kindness now but mockery ? It was an insult ; for it came too late.

With a peremptory snap of angry dignity, therefore, I refused his offer.

'I have work of my own to do here,' I replied. 'Many thanks to you, all the same. You forget that she must never know I am her father. The whole of that dismal story must be a sealed book to her for ever. She is inquisitive now, and must have no chance

of learning the truth. But there, under fresh auspices, she will do well. A broken man like me has no place in a new world, where all is young and hopeful. It would be a constant agony to me to keep my lips closed. The evil thing might escape me while I slept, and babble of its foul existence to the walls. The trees, the flowers, would hear and wither. If she came to know that I was her lost father and a felon, I should never recover the look that she would give me—never, never! No, many thanks! She shall turn up when wanted—I think I can guarantee that; and then a load will be taken off my breast, for which, believe me, I shall not be unthankful.'

The old gentleman was meek and rueful now, discomfited and humbled, in consequence of my brutal refusal of his offer; so he said, sadly:

'Well, have your way, if it must be so. You had better bring the young lady to me where I am staying, and I'll arrange for my cousin to meet her, or—stop! we'll meet at my cousin's place—a lodging-house close to Birdcage Walk, the first turning down by Storey's Gate.'

I shook my head and laughed, as I answered :

‘ Sorry to shock you, sir ; but it’s your own fault for being kind to an incorrigible gaol-bird. I’ve not been out of England, and I’ve not reported myself ; and, seeing how easily you recognised me, I don’t dare show so near to the jaws of the enemy. I should be arrested, and returned to your tender mercies to take up my sentence where it left off !’

‘ And a good thing too !’ growled the chief-warder. ‘ You won’t help yourself, and you won’t let me help you. You’re enough to exasperate the angel Gabriel !’

‘ Need I again impress on you,’ I retorted, with a smile, ‘ that it is scarcely my fault if I am hopeless and beyond help ? Good-bye, and God bless you ! if there is a God ; but the ways of man and his amenities to me have almost made me doubt it. Mildred shall meet you here whenever you wish. You will swear never to divulge the secret which you wot of ? Thanks. Good-bye !’

The old gentleman placed his hands on my two shoulders as a father might, and sur-

veyed me with grave pity as I prepared to go.

‘Hard as nails!’ he grumbled. ‘More sinned against than sinning. What a rummy world!’ and moved away to pay the bill, whilst I went forth into the street.

I had not far to go, and as I walked tranquilly along, reviewed our conversation, phrase by phrase. There was nothing where-with to reproach myself. I had not wavered in my allegiance to the devilish host whose myrmidon I had been these seven years. On the contrary, by rare good luck I had disposed of an incubus which might have impeded my movements sorely.

Though I had carried the matter with a high hand, and flouted the insidious suggestion of the warder, it was by no means clear that, with this drag upon me I might not have faltered at the supreme moment. It would have been a fearsome thing to have handed back in cold blood the girl who had trusted herself with me, to the bondage from which she had fled—to the bad mother who had so lamentably betrayed her trust. I might have put it off, and off, and off; and


floundered into complications with Jaggs and Spevins. There was no end to the troubles and difficulties which might arise as a result of the damsel's tarrying. Could I take her to live with me at the House of Entertainment? and, if I could, what disastrous results might ensue! She would pry into our affairs—do endless mischief—even betray us, perhaps.

What a mercy it was that her cold manner should have stung me into action, and that, my mind made up, or apparently so, I should have met the good old gaoler in the nick of time! The devils were looking after their own—there could be no doubt of it—smoothing away obstacles, levelling roads, greasing wheels. Mildred would soon be removed—for ever. How relieved Jaggs and Spevins would be! And I—should not I, too, be relieved? It would not bear thinking of. I hastened on to break the intelligence to Mildred.



CHAPTER VI.

SHAKING IT OFF.

S it chanced, she was at home, busily engaged in the mysteries of Irish stew. She took no heed of me, as, standing on the threshold of our little room, I gazed wistfully at the lithe figure, the shapely head bent down, the white neck and glittering tresses. How drear would be Black Jack Alley when the sun-beam faded. How the starving sackmakers would regret the vanishing of the bright presence. Strange, that to me alone, who had the strongest claim on her affection, the girl should be so repellent. But everything was destined to go wrong with me; there could be no manner of doubt as to that.

With a sigh I sat down and leaned my elbows on the table, watching.

'It is very good of you,' I said at last, for want of some better way of breaking the dreadful silence, 'to take so much trouble on my account.'

No answer. She was considering something with all her energies.

'What are you thinking about, Mildred?' I inquired, by-and-by.

Still stirring the mess with abstracted air, she replied slowly:

'I've had a talk with that young coal-heaver, and he's set me thinking. This is a woeful place. The hierarchy of heaven must be blind, as well as deaf, for these lost wretches here cry out in vain. And yet, who am I that I should make such a statement? It is ordained for the best, I suppose, if we could only understand it. Fire is a fearsome element, but it purifies while it scorches.'

'Does it?' I repeated, bitterly. 'That may be so with some, perhaps; but it's a blundering remedy, which kills more often than it cures.'

‘The attitude of these people is a lesson,’ she soliloquised. ‘Their contentedness is wonderful. Their sturdy resolve to see the best side of a dark picture is beyond all praise. There’s a new family come in below, about whom I was talking to that coal-heaver just now, and he seemed to look upon their conduct, which amazes me, as quite natural. There’s a man and his wife, and several children, all of them under-fed and badly clothed, with nothing but gloom in front. And yet that man is quite cheerful ; declares that it is all as it should be ; that he was too ambitious for his station, and that therefore it is right his pride should have a fall. He says that when he gets on too well, something always pulls him back, whereby he philosophically recognises the fact that he was not intended to advance beyond a given point. So absolute and entire a faith and trust in the goodness of a Being who seems to find pleasure in tormenting us, is very beautiful.’

Was it ? This view of the question was directly antithetical to that of which Jaggs and Spevins were the apostles. Which was

right? Pooh! this was a feeble feminine way of looking at the subject unworthy the consideration of strong men. Are we to kiss the rod, however unbearable the blows? Was I to kneel down and offer up humble thanksgivings because I was a wreck, because my face was seamed, my heart atrophied? Of course not. We are human, and not angelic; therefore it is idle to expect us to behave like angels. But there was an expression of old Scarraweg's, an hour since, which still lingered in my ears:

‘The finger of God is in it,’ he had said.

Was this girl really sent to me for an especial purpose, to work a special end? No. That, again, was folly. There could be no end for me but one. Her repellent manner was simply irritating; not conducive to mutual good will. The fiat was gone forth that she must depart; and I was sitting before her now, with the deliberate intention of explaining that she must go. She had been sent to me by the devil, not by God, in order that the one cherished speck of brightness shining through heaven's gate might be blotted out; in order that I might be confined as in a

black dungeon—that the one possible talisman of good might be removed, leaving me their prey for evermore.

‘My friends hold different opinions to yours,’ I remarked. ‘They look justly on these cowering wretches with contempt, being mindful of the adage’ that Heaven helps those who help themselves.’

Mildred looked me straight in the eyes, and responded curtly :

‘I don’t like your friends.’

This was aggressive. The devils nudged me, and whispered that it was pert in a damsel so to presume. I laughed, therefore, and returned, with irony :

‘Indeed ! You’ve only seen them once for a moment ; and, considering your age, you should be an excellent judge of mankind.’

Unabashed by the rebuke, she pursued her culinary operations, her thoughts intent on the poor people who were our neighbours ; and observed, after a while :

‘You think, then, that it would be better to steal something and go to prison ? I believe prisoners are very comfortable.’

Was this an attempt on her part to break

the ice ; a gentle innuendo whereby I was to understand that she knew more than I supposed? My guilty conscience made me tremble. How silly was I becoming ! In the dusk we are terrified by shadows, and my comrades were birds of the dusk, as I was. There was nothing to be gained but pain by dallying with that which was to be. 'Twere wisest to rush at the point at once, and have done with it ; so, with a harsh laugh, I said :

‘ That stew of yours smells excellent. To take so much trouble is kind in one who is here to-day and gone to-morrow.’

She dropped her spoon and looked up eagerly.

‘ Gone to-morrow !’ she echoed. ‘ Are you going to send me away ?’

‘ Would you not be glad to go ?’ I asked, in my turn ; for there was a curious ring of regret in the tones of her voice.

She sighed, and considered for a long space. Then turning, and surveying me with a smile I could not fathom, replied :

‘ Ye—es ; I shall be glad to go. I can never be happy here.’

‘I thought you would be glad to leave me,’ I answered, with a touch of pique.

How terrible is the breaking of our images! Woe was me that we should have drifted together so unaccountably, to part as we were doomed to part!

‘I am buffeted by such contradictory feelings,’ she went on gravely, ‘that I scarce know what I say, except that I am quite sure that any change would be for the better. It would not be possible to continue to live as we are living. And yet, when I first saw you on that dreadful night, I seemed to look on an old friend, to listen to a well-remembered voice. You spoke so tenderly; your face was so unutterably sad, that I followed you as I would one near and dear to me. Since then I’ve learnt to know you less and less. Your moods are wild; your looks not sane sometimes. I’m only a girl, and have no right to complain, I am aware; but it is well that we should speak out once before we part. I shall remember you with kindness always.’

I was too sore to reply, so the conversation flagged, as it had a way of doing.

What a pretty face was my little Mildred's ; sweet and grave and pensive. I sat for a long time gazing at her, for she was to go so soon, and we were never to meet again—never, never—and it was a dreary satisfaction to draw another picture in memory upon which to look sometimes. She always spoke sensibly and shrewdly. Her mind was a fair blossom which, under happier auspices, it would have been a joy to watch as it expanded.

‘ You think, then, that the craven endurance of these sackmakers is not contemptible ? ’ I asked by-and-by, with a certain interest, for the other side of the argument had been dinned into my ears frequently enough. You think that people are bound to bear, however wronged and oppressed ? Was no rebellion, no civil war, ever hallowed—no rising to put down injustice sacred ? If such a principle as this of yours is to be accepted, how wrong has been the world's government since the beginning ! If a man is starving through no fault of his own, he is justified in stealing a loaf of bread. That is my view.’

‘In order that he may go to prison,’ retorted the maiden, bending over her stew ; ‘where he will be carefully housed and tended, with only a few crumpled rose-leaves between the blankets.’

How she harped on the question of prison ! Was this really a chance arrow ? and if not, what did she suspect ? I dared not enter into the arena with her, lest a moment of incaution might betray me. She observed my reticence and seemed nettled, but after a break went on again. There could be no doubt but that she tried very hard to drag the snail out of his shell.

‘Have you ever considered,’ she suggested musingly, whilst paring an onion into shreds, ‘the cause of the inequality of things ? Why is it that the life of one should be so unwrinkled—that of his neighbour so ploughed by care ? How is it that in a railway accident, for instance, one man is horribly maimed, while the next one to him escapes scot-free ? It certainly is not that the one is more deserving of punishment than the other, or that he happened to forget his prayers that morning. Do you think that prayers are

ever answered—that the Ruling Power personally superintends the destiny of each? or do you hold that, having started it fairly upon the rails, He allows each man's career to run and take its chance of arriving safe or going wrong? Why is a special knot of persons, selected haphazard, as harmless as their fellows, sent all of a sudden by some short cut into eternity, through the foundering of a pleasure-boat, for example, that has gone securely over its track a thousand times? Why were innocent creatures permitted to languish in the Bastille, for no crime of theirs, through all their lives! True, that was man's work; but why was the accursed place not riven by lightning? Perhaps, though, the prisoners did not suffer so much as one would expect. I believe people can grow accustomed to anything. These patient sackmakers here have set me cogitating about all this, and I can't help turning it over, though I am a girl who knows nothing.'

She was certainly an odd girl, dreamy and reserved, with the same tendency to delve and dig as that which possessed her father,

A girl, unlike the damsels of her age, whose sunless childhood had made her more prone to reflection than is usual in one so young; and the words she spoke—were they thrown out by chance, or with intent?—awakened chords in my own breast which sounded out of tune and strange. She affected to consider that lifelong imprisonment was nothing, because ‘people grow accustomed to anything.’ Ah me! how idly and lightly are theories started and accepted! ‘He jests at scars who never felt a wound.’ Did she speak in this way in order to goad me to betray myself? Had she guessed, I kept wondering, that I had been in prison? And then again that question about prayers!

Did anybody ever pray more fervently than I did when I was first at Pentonville? Much answer had I received to them. On the other hand, the band of devils had answered with commendable promptitude.

‘No,’ I replied, ‘I have little cause to believe in prayers. Do you?’

‘I did,’ she returned, abandoning the stew at its culminating danger and squatting down by my side with an appealing look; then,

finding no encouragement, she added timidly :
' But if I do not believe any more in the power of prayer, it will be through you.'

' Through me !' I cried ; ' why through me ?'

What an odd girl it was !

' Do you know what passed through my mind as I sat by the waterside, that night ?' this singular maid went on. ' Of course you do not. When I found my home unbearable, I said, kneeling in my little room, " My God, I have no friend but You. I cannot see You, but I know You are close by. If I had one visible friend I would wait with meekness till You choose to send for me. But as it is I cannot bear this, and must go of my own accord." And I said it all again as I sat by the ice-hole ; and then you came up, as if out of the ground, and I thought my prayer was answered.'

What chord was this that she was touching without knowing it ? Was Scarraweg's instinct on the true scent when he vowed that he dared not sever the girl from me ? Did she unconsciously feel the same ? No. It was a curious and startling pattern in the

kaleidoscope due to a chance twist—nothing more than that. The girl could not have been sent to me to untie a special knot ; for all I said seemed to grate upon her nerves, as all she said did on mine. We two were as far asunder as the poles ; as complete strangers as Cancer is to Capricorn. She echoed my thought, for after looking at me intently for a while, she gave a sigh of impatient weariness and said :

‘ You were not to be the visible friend, you see, for you and I shall never understand each other. When you deign to converse with me, you always skate. It is rarely that you even condescend to answer at all, except by jests ; and when you do, it is as though you had a padlock on your lips. I am thankful for the kind intention which you showed in bringing me with you ; but I agree that it is best that I should go. What do you purpose doing with me ?’

Yes, it was best. Oh yes, it was ! She was not sent to be a solace. My waning courage returned, and with a superhuman effort I became calm enough to speak of her going with a steady voice.

I spoke of Mr. Scarraweg's proposal, and placing it in the best light, urged her to accept the offer, and make a fresh and fair start in another country. How I got through my task I know not. It was as if you deliberately hewed off a limb with your own hand. Suffice it that I did get through it, and that my anguish was yet further deepened by the gladness which shone out of her eyes. What a babe it was still, despite the demure airs of womanhood and the sententious speech of a sham philosopher! Childlike, with nods and smiles, my Mildred beamed with nascent joy. Straightway, abandoning the subject of endurance and the secret springs which move humanity, she commenced to build enormous palaces in æther, leaving off one without waiting to put on a roof, in order to work at the first-floor of another to which there was no basement. Her pleasure was infectious, and, to please her, I found myself building castles too, with no intention of dwelling in them though; and thus employed, we passed our pleasantest, and at the same time saddest, evening since first we kept house together.

By the hour when I usually retired, she was flushed and animated and apparently happy, and as I lit my candle and said good-night, a persuasive little hand fluttered into mine, and she whispered with upturned face, upon which sat arch reproach :

‘Like that I am not frightened of you. Why can’t you always look and talk so nicely ? Stop half an hour longer—just half an hour, for looking like that. There is something I would wish you to tell me before I go away.’

Smoothing the blonde curls, I stopped, and would have kissed her had I dared.

‘What would you want to know, my darling ?’ I answered.

The word brought up a flush to her temples.

‘You told me on that night,’ she said with growing hesitation, ‘that you attended my dear father’s funeral. Since then you have evaded all my efforts to know more. Why ? did he die a horrid death ? Pray,—pray, tell me ! What was the manner of it ? I think I can bear to hear.’

Oh, daughter of Eve ! always hovering

around the forbidden fruit! I kissed her forehead and murmured, with a groan which should have been a warning to a woman's tact:

'It is a dreadful story, and he would himself, if he lived, have wished that you should always remain in ignorance. It is a story that would sadden your life. Let sleeping dogs lie. He loved *you* very much. Always remember that. And now my lips are sealed.'

She pushed me from her with a wayward petulant action and a flash of the eyes, which was an odd reflection of my old self.

'You are cruel and wicked!' she cried out, with tears of disappointment rising. 'Too sly and secret in your ways for any good. I don't believe you ever knew my father, for you seem to hint at something terrible, and deal in vague parables instead of speaking out. What is there that can have happened to him which I cannot bear to hear? However terrible it may have been, it is past and done; for he lies somewhere now in peace—his soul is with the blest.'

And the tiny hand which could smite with

such ruthless force was flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone! What was all I had gone through before to this?

‘We must be cruel sometimes to be kind,’ I murmured faintly, striving to conceal my pain.

‘You are deceiving me!’ the girl cried; ‘I am sure you are, for you know nothing. I have said that I promise to bear anything. What else can you have to consider? What a grand and clever exploit, to play tricks with a child like me! I am glad to go—very, very glad.’

With heaving bosom she burst into tears, and I left her sitting by the fire. Angels of mercy! What else could I have to consider, forsooth! Why did we ever meet again? I too was glad that she was going, for this was worse than the rack. The devil’s wall was progressing bravely. The sooner father and child were hidden from each other, the better it would be for both.

PART IV.

THE COMFORTER SPEAKS.



CHAPTER I.

A DIPLOMATIC SEA-DOG.



VAST heaving, your honours! Here we are again. I thought I'd said all I had to say, but I find it's necessary for me to take up my pen again, to fill up a hole that Ebenezer's left (he was worried, poor chap), and to give you just a little bit of an idea of how precious artful we old salts become when we're set down among a lot of convicts.

Nothing like convicts to sharpen us up. Dear heart alive! fresh-water lubbers tell you that we're like babbies, so simple, and innocent, and that—which is a civil way of saying we're *stoopid*, but it is not so. I'll back a salt to be the handiest man in a dozen picked from all trades. I myself, for

instance, am first class as a carpenter in an amateur way—can make wonderful things out of odds and ends when I have time ; from a cupboard out of a packing-case to a pair of shutters out of a broken sea-chest. I admit I was done once though (I tell you this, but keep it dark), when my landlady came and asked me to put a new wire into her set of false teeth ; but then that wasn't carpenter's work, was it ?

And this is not caulking the hole in Ebenezer's narrative, is it ? I'm like an Irish day-labourer ; always ready for a gossip instead of attending to my work. Well, as I was saying, convicts do sharpen us up, and my turn in Dartmoor Prison has sharpened me up. When I saw Ebenezer standing on that landing-stage in those swell clothes, I said to myself, at once : ' That lad, whose behaviour was so good during his last years, has gone backward. He has fallen into bad hands, and I'm sorry for it. I know, by the experience of men who've come back to us, how hard it is for one who means well to escape his prison pals. They dog his steps, and follow him, and invite him to take drinks, and set

their women on him. Tilgoe and some of 'em say that it's the police who prevent a ticket-of-leave man from earning a honest livelihood. Not a bit of it ; it's much more often his own prison pals who've got felon written on their faces, while he, perhaps, has not ; and then the employers say to themselves : ' If this new chap of ours chooses to keep the company of these villainous-looking fellows, with hair cut down at the sides in Newgate knockers, the sooner we get rid of him the better ;' and so he gets the sack, and has to fall back upon his pals for assistance. And so it was with Ebenezer Anderson, I could see with half an eye. Then, as he has told you (I don't like the way he's put it, but I've no right to change his MSS., and so must let it stand), I walked away with him and tried to pull him back ; but he looked so bitter and stony that I saw it wasn't any good arguing with him just at that time, and so I made an appointment for us to meet again, and meanwhile went and had a chat with my cousin, who was about to emigrate with bag and baggage, and asked her if she'd take his gal along with her, if so be as he

really meant to let her go, which I refused altogether to believe. And here's where my artfulness came in, as you'll see, for I didn't despair yet of saving him from himself. Yourself is generally your worst enemy, you know. What's that the Scripture says about all the angels in heaven weeping over the repentance of one wicked man? I always think that's the prettiest picture in the whole Bible, and if I could afford it, and knew where to go to get it done cheap by an artist as knows his business—and there ain't many—I'd make somebody paint it for me, to hang over my bed to look at when I wake or when I lie ill, or that. Fancy all their bright faces, with blessed tears on them, and finding their pleasure in watching the ways of mortals, and rejoicing that the crawling little dirty speck below should be walking straight, instead of crooked! I always think of that when I go to the top of St. Paul's or the Monument, and look down at the carts like pins' heads, and the men and women—each one brimful of joy or trouble as the case may be, generally trouble—so tiny that you can hardly see 'em at all. And when I get

a few days' leave and take out my nephews, they always will go to the top of St. Paul's, and I always let 'em, because it's a cheap amusement and improving, if somewhat trying to old legs like mine.

As I think I've said, I had a week's leave just now to see my cousin off; and on this occasion, instead of taking out my nephews for their holiday exercise, I occupied myself altogether with Ebenezer and his affairs. That's bad, you'll say, for the goldenest of rules is to mind your own business. You may make up your mind that there's no use palavering with a man when he's spiteful, and Ebenezer was precious spiteful when I met him that time; and, upon my soul, I can't wonder at it after the story which he told me, and which, I could tell by his face, was true. So I set myself to consider how I could wheedle him round to look at things in a less bitter way. In this life we must all make up our minds to suffer more or less, for it is not intended to be too jolly, and a good thing too, or else there would be a terrible squalling about going out of it; and so when we find we get more slaps in the face than

our neighbours, we ought to stand steady on our sea-legs and shake ourselves together, just as we do when the spray comes over and wets us to the skin, and say, Avast there ! Stand by ! That's one mark to me in the next world. But, Lord bless my heart, I needn't waste my ink and my time in telling you ladies and gents that, for you hear it once a week, at least, in church—leastways, that is, if you happen to be awake. I thought and thought how Ebenezer's bitterness was to be washed out of him, and I got regularly bothered. He said his life was broken, and I couldn't deny but it was—that he had no family or belongings, but was absolutely *alone*, which I look on as the height of human misery, and I didn't see my way to alter this state of things. Then, as I thought and thought, and put this and that together, like the bits of a puzzle that won't fit, I came to the conclusion that that gal of his had been sent specially, and no mistake, to pull him round, and that it was terribly vexing that he would not allow her. From what he let drop, it struck me that she was a disagreeable sort of gal, which was a pity—

perky, and hoity-toity, and that ; and then I remembered that people get at cross purposes and misunderstand each other, sometimes all through their lives, only for the want of somebody who's artful, and who knocks their heads together, and says, 'Come now, here's a hencoop for you ; cling to it, while I get the boat out, and then you won't be drowned.' I was convinced, somehow or other, that that gal was intended to be his hencoop ; her running away from home, and falling into his arms, as it were, was so very extraordinary that it seemed to point to that, and so I thought I'd just overhaul the young craft for myself, and investigate her sailing-powers.

When Anderson brought her to my cousin's place, I must confess it didn't appear promising. He looked like a man that's going to die, with a tight yellow skin and great sunken eyes, but the tip of his nose was pinched and his lips set firm ; and he just handed her over to my cousin, and said, as indifferent as bread and butter, 'This is the young lady that I picked up, and I'll thank you kindly to look after her,

for she's an orphan, with neither father nor mother now ;' and then he gave her a long look, as if he could have eaten her, and nodding to me, and shaking her by the hand, as if it didn't matter, went off just like that, which could not be called promising, could it ?

After he was gone I reckoned up the gal, to see if nothing was to be made of her, and took her down to the docks, by way of making her see the ship, and the berth, and the cargo going in, and the stores and all, so that she should realise that she really was leaving Old England behind, for all her life. Some people have such difficulty in realising things. I've seen many a one as careless as you please till they saw the vessel, and everything stowed ship-shape for the voyage ; and then they'd give way all at once, and cry out that it was better to starve at home than have plenty in exile, and fall into convulsions with the home-sickness which people who live in mountainous countries suffer so from. But by that time, you know, it's all up—houses and furniture are made over to others, and it's too late to change your

mind ; and that's what makes the departure of emigrant ships so heart-rending a sight. I thought that perhaps the gal would think better of it if I showed her the ship, and prefer returning to her mother, which would give me time to be artful and concoct something to save Ebenezer.

But she was quite calm over it, disgustingly calm ; seeming to grow a little dizzy with the noise, but to be interested in all she saw. A fine grown, pretty lass, enough. With a straight nose, and straight eyebrows, and an expression perhaps a leetle too decided and independent for her time of life. It was a self-contained expression, as if she was accustomed to think a great deal, but to keep her thoughts inside, for want of some one who'd care to know about them. I took her down to the cabin where she and my cousin and the children were to sleep. Everybody being too busy to attend to us, I seized the opportunity to heave over a lead, just to see where the shoals lay.

'So you're glad to go,' I said, quite pleasant-like. 'When you've no one to look to, it's nice to change the scene, ain't it ? Have

you got no little sisters or brothers ? That poor fellow that picked you up said you were an orphan.'

'I am an orphan,' she untruthfully answered, without a blush.

'With no one who'll miss your care here ? Your case then is singular and unhappy. It's given to few to be so cursed as to have no ties at all.'

She looked up at that, rather startled and uneasy, and I began to feel better as I went on :

'Mr. Anderson's one of that unfortnuit sort, I'm sorry to say—without a creature in the wide world to look after him.'

The lead could find no bottom. She was staring out of a porthole, just as if Ebenezer never existed. I was on a wrong tack. For she didn't seem to care twopence about Mr. Anderson ; and yet, with that pretty face of hers—I resolved to persevere. .

'A good chap, very, is Mr. Anderson,' I remarked quite careless-like. 'As you'd think, if you knew him as well as I do.'

'I know more of him than you, perhaps,' she murmured, knitting those brows of hers,

and finding something very amusing outside of that there porthole.

It was my turn to be startled now.

‘What do you know, little miss?’ I asked.

‘Never mind,’ she snapped out sharply.

‘If you knew him as I do,’ I proceeded, as bold as brass, loaded to the muzzle with good intentions, ‘you’d know that his lot has been as hard as that, perhaps, of any man on earth. It’s a story that should wring drops of pity from a stone. Under that cold outside, he’s as upright and honest a man as ever breathed.’ The gal looked so pinched and stern and virtuous—as juveniles will who’ve never been tempted yet—that I felt like going off into a tantrum. ‘You’re a blame-worthy young bit of goods,’ I blurted out—to save my life I couldn’t keep my blood from boiling, though I did try to be patient—‘to leave him all alone to pine, after his saving you as he did from a wicked act.’

The colour was mounting to the gal’s cheeks and temples—she too was getting angry, and I was not so very sorry. When folks get cross they speak out the plainer. The battle’s sharp, but it’s sooner done with.

‘Did he tell you that he wanted me?’ she demanded without moving. ‘No, of course he didn’t. What do you mean by speaking to me like this? I was a nuisance to him, and he made me feel that I was. I seem born to be a nuisance to everybody, and yet I never asked to be born. If he had wanted me, I think I should have stopped with him even in that dreadful place. Yes, I’m afraid I should. I am so lonely; and yet I ought not—it wouldn’t be right.’

‘Not be right!’ I cried. ‘Why not, you aggravating bit of goods? It’s not the first time by several that a helpless person has been adopted by a stronger one, and it won’t be the last, pray goodness!’

She turned slowly round and faced me.

‘You are an old man,’ she remarked, ‘and I young, with no experience.’

‘Like this here steamer without the screw,’ I suggested; ‘handsome, but of little use.’

‘If you know that man, as you say you do, will you dare place your hand upon your heart, and tell me that I ought to have stopped with him?’

Deliberately I placed my two hands upon

my heart, and answered as fervently as if I was down upon my knees saying my prayers :

‘As God is looking at us, you ought. He’s poor and friendless. It’s on the cards that you might save him from hell-fire !’

‘Oh!’ she cried, breaking out. ‘You, with your grey hairs, dare to tell me that ! You know as well as I do that he’s been in prison. Is it fitting that one like me, who has nothing but her innocence, should be living along of a man like that ?’

I was fairly taken aback. How could she know he had been in prison ? Perhaps, more artful even than I, she was aware who he was all the time. In that case, Ebenezer’s dread was not without foundation. She knew her father was a felon, and recoiled from him. Poor fellow !

The young lady was not slow to perceive that she had scored a point, and to follow up her advantage.

‘He’s a thief—a common thief. I knew that from something that his companions said the only time I ever saw them. He was angry that they should have come in even once when I was there. Such companions !’

she continued, with a scornful little nose. 'The man saved me from drowning myself, perhaps, though I'm not so sure that I should have had courage to go through with it, and brought me home and fed me for a few weeks. I am not ungrateful for that, and would have done what I could for him, if he would have let me. It isn't poverty that I am afraid of. Heaven knows! my life has been so wretched, that I would welcome any poverty, so long as it was honest. I was grateful for the man's kindness at first, and would have shown it; but his conscience pricked him; he knew what he was, and that my place was not with him—I'll do him that justice—and he is as much relieved at my departure as I can be. You will not tell me that, because a man took me in when I was houseless, I am bound to stop with him all my life, when I discover that he is a thief?

'He's not a thief—you're wrong, you stoopid gal!' I replied stoutly, though I felt, with an uneasy twinge, that there was no knowing what he might become unless shaken with all speed out of his present state of mind. 'He's not

a thief, and never was. How uncharitable it is to build up theories upon half-sentences, overheard by accident. As you grow older, young lady, you won't, I trust, be so uncommon anxious to show up the evil in your neighbours !

But unheeding she went on.

'And his cruel, cruel deceit !' she muttered. 'By some method, and for some purpose unknown, he found out how I loved my father, and stooped to mean subterfuge to gain my confidence. He was low enough to tamper with my most sacred memories ; to pretend—but there his resolution failed him—even he was shocked at his own baseness.'

'Your father !' I exclaimed, a light breaking on me.

She was in tears now, softened by those memories, as she replied :

'He induced me to go with him by saying that he had known my father—for, alas ! my father came, I fear, to some terrible end, and I believed that this man could enlighten me ; and I loved to believe he could till, little by little, my eyes were opened, and I knew

that he had condescended to deceive me—that he was a liar as well as a thief!

I saw my way now. What an artful old fellar I had been to put on a bit of tantrum, when I wanted her to open out! Didn't I tell you that there's nothing like people flying in a passion with each other just to make everything turn out jolly? Well, she was piqued a bit, but not enough to make her bid me mind my own business.

'Did you ever know your father?' I inquired of the young gal. 'Of course you must have, to be so precious fond of him. Was he as short as Nelson, or as tall as the Irish giant? Was he good-looking or ugly? Should you know him again if you saw him, or would you recognise his pictur'?

The young lady twisted her head round sharp, and showed a pair of rosy cheeks. She thought me, I could see, an interfering old cuss, but what cared I for that? I nodded pleasantly, and my grey hair was not without its effect upon her youth. After a pause of a minute or two, during which I made believe to listen to the 'Heave-ho!' on deck, as if I'd never heard it afore, she pulled

herself together, and sat down on a rolled mattress, thinking, and answered in a low drawl, as if asleep :

‘ I seem as if I should know him, and yet as if I shouldn’t. I was only four when he went away, and I thought him big—very big ; but children deceive themselves so as to proportions. I reached up to his waist or thereabouts, and he used to take me out into the country—among the birds and racing clouds and scudding troops of insects. I associate him with the day, for it was only when it was brilliant that he took me out ; and he was so careful of me. Since he vanished, all has been so sunless. He used to sit down, I remember, and paint or draw so long as the day lasted, singing songs to amuse me, and getting up, now and then, to rush along the grass with me. And then when I grew drowsy, as I would when the day waned, with the exercise and the fresh air, he used to take me in his arms, and carry me home as I slept upon his shoulder—oh, how well I remember that ! Sometimes, if the way happened to be long, I woke up confused with the jolting and frightened with

the darkness and silence of the evening ; and then I would catch sight of his loving smile and feel how tenderly and strongly he supported me, and fall off to sleep again. It is thus that I remember him most clearly, though even that is blurred. A hazy protecting spirit—a beneficent strong man supporting my infant weakness in the dark. That is how I remember my father, and will remember him always, till the end in the far-off foreign land to which we are going !’

The gal’s head had sunk back against the rolled-up mattress. Tears poured unheeded down her face, and seemed to have washed the harsh lines of pride away.

‘You are certain he is dead ?’ I suggested, with tremendous artfulness. ‘If he is, it doesn’t matter how far from his grave you go. Once under the sod, a man’s more removed from you by two feet of mould than if he stood on the Antipodes. By-the-bye, where is his grave ?’

Ladies and gents, ain’t you all sprawling on your backs in admiration of my artfulness ?

Do what I would, though—what with

blowing of my nose and taking snuff—I could not keep down the overflow; it would come. My battered old cheeks and ‘Newgate frill’—as that imperent Ebenezer goes on about—were as wet as her cheeks, for Ebenezer’s sake. She remarked the phenomenon, and, womanlike, sprang at the idea that I meant more than I was a-saying.

She jumped up and shook me. She did indeed, the brazen baggage! in spite of grey hairs and barge-like build; and, while she pulled my coat, kept crying, ‘You know something of this. You know where he lies;’ and then, turning quite white and sick, whispered low, ‘What a fool I am to be thinking that all the world knows or cares about my sorrow!’ and with that she pushed back the masses of her hair, and buried her face in the mattress.

‘That looks as if you knew uncommon little about it yourself, my lass,’ I observed. She was so impetuous and saucy that it was good to give her a sly slap. ‘If you’re not aweer where he’s buried, p’r’aps he mayn’t be dead—who shall tell?’

Those pretty fingers were quivering like

young eels ; and I could see, being so artful, that, though the gal's face was buried, she was a-listening.

‘People disappear sometimes for reasons over which they’ve no control, and, like bad sixpences, turn up again, when everybody thinks ’em worthless. If I told you now that I had known your father, you’d fly out like a spitfire, I suppose, and talk a deal about baseness and deceit, and insult me, who am respectable enough to be your grand-par. I know you would, so I won’t tell you so. You would not respect my grey hairs, I’m certain.’

She was shaking now as if she must fall to pieces ; and, spite of all the nasty things Ebenezer has said of me in his MSS., I wasn’t going to hold his daughter in suspense. But, at the same time, I was not sure whether she, in a romantic woman’s way, might not prefer the sham father guilt by her own fancy to the real article, dinged and battered in by trouble. And I also remembered, with compunction, that Ebenezer had wrung an oath from me with regard to that secret confided to my care. I wonder

whether the angels, when they deign to look down and watch us, are much troubled if we roll over on our sides? We get up and creep along, much as before, only a little dirtier. May we commit a tiny sin to prevent a greater one? I felt a conviction that that oath was wicked, and must be broken. Betwixt me and my conscience, we'd let it slide, if need were, and say no more about it.

'I don't mind telling you that I did know your father,' I announced, smacking my lips to keep my voice from shaking. 'But I shan't tell you much about him, because I've little to tell that you'd like to learn.'

She uncovered a livid green face, with burning eyes like coals, and rather shuddered out than said:

'The words *he* used! What are you concealing from me? Oh, do speak out!'

'Supposing,' I went on, hoarsely (this was the worst job I ever had in hand), 'that he had disgraced himself and did not dare come back to you.'

She did not make the haughty movement now which, on that night in the snow, had rendered Ebenezer dumb.

‘Supposing that he had—ahem!—had committed a crime——’

‘A crime!’ she echoed, clinging with writhing fingers round her throat.

‘Supposing that he had committed murder—steady now, lass! remember your sea-legs—and had—no, not been hanged, but respited, and had, by a long, weary penance, washed away the blood. Supposing——’

The gal sank, moaning, down upon the floor, and I was fairly frightened out of my wits. I thought she was about to die, and that I, a muddled old ass, had killed her. It was a desperate experiment; but, for Ebenezer’s sake, worth trying to the end, come what might of it. She was huddled up like a bunch of soiled linen—all eyes; her face not white, but greenish-grey; her fingers moving round and about her neck, as though there were throttling cords tied round, which squeezed the breath out slowly. A pretty thing, was not it? What if the steward were to take it into his head to come round, or the skipper, or some one, and find us like this! Why, my grey hair and all my certificates would not be able to save my

character. A real nice double-distilled idiot I was for my pains—surelie! I, a chief officer of Dartmoor Prison, mixing myself up in the troubles of ex-convicts! However, I had gone too far to retreat. There was a drop of water in a bottle on the shelf; I sprinkled it over the gal, and she revived.

‘Men may commit murder, you know,’ I said in a whisper, to make her more comfortable, ‘without exactly knowing what’s been done, though that sounds as if it should be manslaughter, don’t it? But it isn’t. Things are very seldom what they ought to be. You expressed most properly your abhorrence of my poor friend Anderson, under supposition that he was a thief, in which, as I told you, you were wrong. If this father of yours, whom you’ve lost since you were four, should turn out to be alive—a *respited murderer*’—(I dwelt specially on this, I was so artful, for it was sharp and wholesome, like a blister)—‘how would you meet him?’

Those eyes of hers were piercing me like bradawls. She seemed to understand, but did not answer; and says I to myself, ‘You’re a

bad gal if you've any doubt how you would meet him.'

'Supposing,' I suggested, just to help her, for she was dazed-like, 'supposing that I was chief - warder of a prison—shall we say Dartmoor?—Dartmoor be it, if you like. And that I knew your father there, crushed to the earth with suffering and grief; so broken down that even I—a surly old bear—could pity him. And supposing that even the minister of her Most Gracious Majesty (God bless her!) pitied him too, and let him out; and supposing that his temper was become sour through what he'd undergone, and that he was in danger of going altogether to the bad, through want of a little hand, like yours there, to pull him straight, would you leave him here alone in England to go to ruin, and sail away in this ship to begin your life again on your own account in the New World?'

'My place would be here, by his side,' the young gal gasped, as if out of breath.

I didn't go up and hug her then and there, because I was so artful. The blister was a splendid blister. Blisters have saved lives ere now. The tingling of it did her good;

she must keep it on another minute to make the cure complete.

‘Don’t be in a hurry,’ I answered, warningly. ‘Young ladies must think a bit before they make up their minds, because there are some occasions when they can’t be allowed to alter them. Supposing the *murderer* was not repentant, not at all repentant or humble, but cross-grained, cursing God and man for the sin he had himself committed, don’t you think it might be more prudent to leave him to his fate? You are a wise young woman for your time of life, and you were right enough when you said that a young lady whose only wealth is her innocence ought to look precious sharp after it. My poor friend Anderson was a thief, you said, and so very properly you turned that pretty, straight back of yours on him. A murderer’s a precious sight worse nor a thief, you know; and my advice to Innocence is to let him be.’

The blister was biting too hard, and she winced under it. Shivering and shaking, for all the world as if she had a high fever, she struggled up on her feet, and clutched me by the arm.

‘You say all this to try me,’ she murmured, while her tears flowed. ‘My father would never commit a crime deliberately. It was an accident. Poor, poor father ! How he must have suffered ! Take me to him—quick !’

She had a veil twisted round her cheap bonnet, and I drew it down, soft and respectful, before we left the cabin ; and I adjusted her cloak, and made her take my arm, she was shaking so. We made our way through the piles of luggage and loose ropes, and all through the confusion of the deck, across a plank to the landing-stage. Then I made her hold fast by the old hulk, and led her back to the place she came from. The young gal didn’t seem much surprised at that ; for she knew now why Ebenezer had spoken so tenderly, and conscience was worriting, I daresay, as conscience will.

It was a dismal afternoon, and a drizzle began to fall. Black Jack Alley looked more greasy and sludgy, and more vile and tumble-down even than usual. What was Ebenezer doing ? I wondered. Was he at home, or gone upon some devil’s business ?

We went up the stairs, and in the passage I had to hold the young gal up, and I grinned and nodded to encourage her. The key was in the lock, so he was at home ; that was a comfort. Then I opened the door with caution, and we looked in. There was no fire nor light, but I could just detect the outline of Ebenezer's figure by the hearth, where he sat with his head lying on his arms on the low mantel-shelf. The young gal leaned against the door-post, with eyes contracted and fluttering breath. I gave her hand a squeeze as a reminder, and motioned that she ought to go to him. Somehow or other she managed to totter across the floor, and sank down by his side upon her knees. At first he didn't know that she was there, till her arms were wound around him. Then he started up with a great cry, looking as fierce as you please, like an animal at bay.

‘What's this ?’ he shouted, catching sight of me. ‘What have you done ? Why have you brought her back, when I hoped never to see her more ?’

Then, seized with a terror, he recoiled

from the gal, and shrank right away into a dark corner where he was hidden.

‘What have you done?’ he kept mumbling.

‘What have you done? You have betrayed your trust.’

‘By God’s grace, I have,’ I answered.

‘She knows all.’

And closing the door softly, I crept downstairs on tiptoe, just to take a stroll for half an hour; more pleased, ladies and gents, let me tell you, than I had been for many a year.



CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF WARDER'S DECISION.

E STEPPED back again to the ship on a little matter of business, which I had to arrange; and did not return to Black Jack Alley for an hour and a half. I don't mind saying that I felt uncommon jolly, for I seemed to see the angels up aloft looking down on Ebenezer as a cantankerous insect that had crawled uncommon crooked, but was going to walk straight at last. There was little doubt in my mind as to that, though I didn't know so much as I do now, after reading the MSS. That was an awful blow that I had to give the gal, a blow with the fist between the eyes, delivered with all my strength, under which she reeled and stag-

gered. But she was of good grit, just like her father. He was as proud as Lucifer, and so was she. They were both stiff-necked and stubborn-kneed. Why should not one teach the other to be humble? What was the matter with Ebenezer all along, was that he felt overwhelmed with a sense of loneliness. If he'd had anyone to tell it to, he would have borne his trial better. From the moment that he changed his name till now, solitude had been the worm that gnawed his vitals without ceasing. For not only had he given up his relations, but his private friends as well. Do you realise, ladies and gents, the position of one who is quite young, and has not a single person who knows him on the surface of the globe? Not an acquaintance, not an aged retainer even, or a shopman who bows to him as an old customer. He needed what to us mortals is as the breath of life—sympathy. When I observed that for years and years he never received a letter or a visit, I was drawn to the man by curiosity, and, not being altogether a fool, could detect how his withers were wrung. Every prisoner under my charge had a hope

of some kind—a home to think of, however poor and degraded, even if it was only a familiar basket in Covent Garden market—a pal who would be glad to see him when he came out (and a bad lot too, most of those pals—but that's neither here nor there). With Ebenezer Anderson it wasn't so. His character was warped and twisted all awry. His nature said, 'Find a pal of some sort—you must, for it ain't possible to go on like this, devouring your own stummick;' and the only choice that chance and our blessed system gave him was between a polished scoundrel, like the Reverend Aurelius (cuss him !), and an ignorant, good-natured chap, without a sense of right or wrong, like Spevins. And it's much to his credit, I say, that he chose the ignorant one.

But by the lucky circumstance of his daughter getting into a mess herself, a door was opened for his reformation, which none would have dreamed of. And when Ebenezer told me of it in that pub at Wapping, it was as much as I could do to prevent myself from saying 'Hooroar!' and getting up and capering about the room

like a lunatic. That the gal who had that mission before her (as Ebenezer would call it) could be a bad gal was not possible, or she wouldn't have been given such a mission. The ways of this world are queer, I admit, and provoking sometimes, no doubt; but I declined to believe that anything so tantalising could take place as that the two should be brought together from the ends of the earth, as it were, for no result to come of their meeting. That would have been too exasperating—wouldn't it? Ebenezer was too proud to speak—the mark of the prison brand smarted too much for that—and the gal being of the same flesh and blood, and a hoighty-toity bit of goods, as pert and giddy young gals will be till they've had something to make 'em cry a bit, she took offence and turned up her nose at him, and persuaded herself that it was mighty virtuous to leave the poor lonely man in the lurch, because his pals were a trifle quisby. I would not believe but that all that was gammon; and not being by any means a fool, you see I was right. Well, I'd brought the pair together, and a hard job too—I was all of a perspira-

tion over it, and my shirt was sticking to my back—and I made up my mind to return presently when they had both had their cry out, and ‘improve the occasion,’ as our chaplain says. That Ebenezer had fallen into bad hands was clear, and that he was plotting something foolish and wicked was clear too. But the loving pity of his daughter, and her sympathy for his sorrows, must draw him out of that. He was not a man to lead his own child astray—nothing of the kind—although many of our convicts will, I’m sorry to say, ‘like a bird,’ as the saying is. So I’d just trot back when my little business aboard-ship was done, and preach my little sermon that they might see plainly how they stood, with the unbiassed eyes of a bystander, and then I’d trot away again for another spell, and leave the leaven to work.

And so I did. When I got back I was too artful to go bouncing in and making them ashamed, not such a marplot by a good deal. No, I creaked and tumbled down upon the stairs, and coughed and cleared my throat, and made a rasping noise like a

chicken with the pip, in order that they might be quite prepared, and then gave a discreet knock.

‘Come in,’ the gal said, and I came in, and glad I was to see them sitting on the same chair, with all the proud lines gone for ever.

Ebenezer’s eyes glistened as he held out his hand to me. ‘God bless you!’ was all that he could say; but there was a lot in it, enough to make me sniff and look out of the window, while I passed my hand across my face. But that wouldn’t do. I wasn’t there to snivel; therefore I clapped him on the back, and said as cheerfully as if there were no such things as want, and temptation, and crime, all round about:

‘You see, old chap, that it’s all coming right. It’s a long lane that has no turning, as the land-lubbers say; it’s a long voyage that has no haven, as we said at sea. Your voyage has been long and stormy, but you’ll come to port by-and-by. A ten days’ trip and you will reach the harbour—only ten days or so; that’s nothing after twelve years, is it?’

Ebenezer seemed puzzled, and looked at me for an explanation. I blundered about a bit—some things are so plaguy difficult to say—but after humming and hawing, and beating about the bush till I got all of a perspiration again, it came out somehow.

‘That young gal of yours is a-going to sail the day after to-morrow for Canada, to settle—we’ve arranged all that, you know; and here’s a ticket for yourself. It came into my head just now, quite accidental-like, to go and take it; for you couldn’t let her travel all that way by herself, could you? And when you get there you’ll want to look about—so we’ll arrange that little loan I told you of, and you’ll pay it back by-and-by. Say no more. That’s taut and ship-shape. Be obedient! You should have learned to obey me by this time.’

Ebenezer’s features were working as he shaded his eyes with his hand. Now was the time for my little sermon.

‘You’ve been sorely tried, Ebenezer,’ I began. ‘We all know that: we can see how sorely by the reflection in your gal’s pretty face. Because a man or woman falls, that’s

no reason why they should not get up again. It's only a coward who, instead of getting up, lies in the mud howling. You're too good a sort to lie in the mud howling any more—for you have been doing that there, I'm sorry to have to tell you so. You've howled a jolly sight too much. Come, courage, man ! For the sake of that homeless gal, if not for your own, you'll give up your plans, whatever they may be. Never mind your pals, they'll get on well enough without you ; and they'll come back to me by-and-by in due course, for another bout of hair-cropping. Your duty is bound up with that gal more than with them ; and if you've got to throw anybody overboard, it must be them, and not her. You don't dare deny it, with her arm round your neck like that !

He seemed undecided still, and I could have hit him with pleasure ; but the young gal came to the rescue. She kissed his lips, rubbing her cheek against his, and said softly :

'My father will do your bidding. You are our benefactor ; what you order he shall obey.'

‘That’s hearty,’ I cried. ‘Didn’t I say you were a wise young woman! You shall be boss, and pick him out of the mud. As he’s such a poor grovelling creature that he won’t pull himself together, you will have to take the helm: keep a steady hand on it, and it will answer to your touch—never fear.’

And as she sat blinking and smiling, with one arm about her father’s neck, I thought it only fair that the surly old turnkey should have a kiss too, especially as he wanted to talk about a little matter of business that confused him rather. Everything comes out, you know, except murder (which doesn’t, as a rule, though the proverb says it does), and so this came out too; and there was a little more kissing and blushing, and saying, ‘Oh dear no; not for the world;’ and ‘We couldn’t think of it by any manner of means,’ and so forth, and a struggling and more kissing; and then it was arranged to the satisfaction of everybody, and of me in particular, that that young gal was to be the sole legatee of the grumpy old bear who had something put away in a stocking—though not very much—together with a teapot wrapped in a hand-

kerchief, and a solid watch and chain. But we'll say no more about that.

Well, these important matters being settled, we sat sensibly down to talk over pros and cons, and how things had best be managed. Lord forgive me ! As a chief-warder I was not behaving well, though as a private individual I think I was. Being away on leave, I did not look on myself in the light of a chief-warder. The vessel was to sail in two days, so I agreed that it was not worth while for Ebenezer to report himself at Scotland Yard. The more we talked the thing over, the more of one mind did we become as to emigration. Though Ebenezer was free on licence, he was a ticket-of-leave man for the rest of his days ; bound to report himself to the police every month for the rest of his natural life if he elected to reside in England. If the past was to be effaced, this thorn must be plucked out of his flesh. There was no reason why he should not go. His wife, whom he detested, and who had behaved bad, was re-married, and mother of a second family. Nothing was to be gained by disturbing that household. On the other side of the water

Ebenezer would resume the thread of his career; would even sing again in the sunlight perhaps in time, with his daughter by his side, as he used to do. Those twelve years of agony would linger faintly in memory, like a bad dream which had never been real. So I thought, and so I told him; and his face wore a new look of hope, which was in turn reflected on Miss Mildred's. And here was another idea to set his mind at ease as to the little loan. I threatened by-and-by to go and join them across the water. What cause should I have for remaining in England so soon as I had won my pension? I should not be sorry, I can tell you, to turn my face from Dartmoor and the weariful opening and shutting of locks, and the hairless bullet-pates and villainous visages, the blue woollen stockings and mustard-coloured garments daubed with the broad arrow! Ebenezer and my legatee would be in America, so would my cousin and her children, the only relations that I had in the world. Of course I would emigrate too, when I could manage it—say five years hence—and come the chief-warder over them in their new home—aye, wouldn't

I!—and torment them for years to come ; for, though my hair was grey, my constitution was sound and hale, and I come of a long-lived family.

Thus we chatted on far into the night, till the flame of the tallow candle guttered near the socket, and the circles round the bonny eyes of my legatee grew darker. She was worn out with the emotions of the day, and yet could not tire of watching her father, from whose face the steel-cold expression was gone, which had so repelled and frightened her. It became my duty, therefore, to exercise my authority ; so I rattled an imaginary bunch of keys, and packed them both off to bed, and took my leave, promising to return next day.

Dear heart alive ! I had done a good action, and I was proud to think of it. I don't believe in the axiom which says that one hand is not to know what t'other does. By all means, I say, let the right hand be posted up as to what the left is doing ; for the left won't do wrong if he knows he's being watched ; and if he's doing right he's a good example to the other. I had done a

good action, and I saw my reward in the shape of a family of my own, all ready made ! The lonely old bear had given himself a clever son and a sweetly pretty granddaughter, whom he would love, and who would learn to love him—shaggy old fellow though he was ! There was a handsome present ! and he was sending them off out of sight for a while to prepare a future home for him, where they would light his fire and warm his slippers, and smooth his pillow, and close his old eyes, when his time came, with tender touch and gentle fingers. Wasn't that something nice to think of ? And I did think of it, and I blessed God for His great goodness, and found myself sobbing like a little child myself in the silence of the night for thankfulness, instead of indulging in a good strong snore, as sensible men of my age should.

Well, I went next day to buy a thing or two to make my legatee more comfortable upon the voyage, and a thick great-coat for Ebenezer ; and surprised Black Jack Alley not a little by arriving there laden with parcels.

Ebenezer was better already, I could see, and relieved at being taken in hand.

‘The crust (the real one this time) around my heart is broken,’ he said, ‘which made it feel so painful, like a stone. Sometimes I felt as if I had no heart at all. I could not see that, because I had sinned, I deserved so heavy a chastisement. But the change which you completed has been working silently for some time past, though I was not aware of it. The meekness of the unhappy sack-makers, who starve in their garrets hereabout, though they have done no wrong, was a riddle to me which I could not solve till my Mildred solved it for me. Human affairs are ordained in so curious a fashion that we should call it slip-slop, if it was not impious. But I see now why people are made to suffer so awfully here below. It is that the grossness of their essence should be refined by human sympathy. How beautiful it is to think that one imperfect crippled creature should be enabled to fit another for a place aloft through the sheer power of his love! Is it not a distinct reflection from the face of God Himself? Thanks to you and her, old friend, through Him, I have learned the lesson of patience and humility.’

I thought that very pretty for a gaol-bird, so I wrote it down, and Ebenezer's smile, as I did so, had a sweetness that I had never seen before. I was just whispering about it to my fair-haired young legatee, when all of a sudden there was a great clatter down below, which recalled us to the present. Somebody was rushing up the stairs, singing in a voice that I couldn't help thinking I knew; then the door was banged open by a kick, and a flash young man stood grinning on the threshold.

It was Spevins—D 48—gorgeously got up with a flapping scarlet necktie, and behind him L R Y 233, the only man whom I hate on earth (except perhaps Tilgoe).

'How are yer, my noble captin?' sang Spevins; 'and my pretty young Duchess of Mayfair, how are you?' Then his song died away as he caught sight of me, like the tune of an organ when the bellows stops working.

The eyes of the burglar goggled in his head with astonishment, while Jaggs, who was looking over his shoulder, ejaculated unconsciously, 'My uncle!'

Now that, as you know, always did drive

me wild. I respect my name because my parents were honest people, if poor—and so were theirs before them, and so was I, always—and it did rise my dander when that rascally scamp dared to take it in vain. I'm not spiteful, I hope, but I never could bear impudence, and liberties I never could put up with, and certainly not from convicts. So I flew in a tantrum, I regret to say, before the eyes of my legatee, who had called me her benefactor, and, getting red-hot, bawled out :

‘You owdacious varmint ! clear away from this ! You’ve no business here ; be off, or you’ll have a marline-spike about yer ribs !’

But, somehow or another, Jaggs wasn’t as frightened as I could have wished. Whether it was his own fine clothes, or his kid gloves, or the fact that I was out of uniform, being on leave, I can’t say. Anyway, he stared at me, and grinned as bold as brass, till my fists itched to pummel him. Spevins turned a trifle serious, and ran those beady eyes of his from one to another suspiciously, as though he smelt a rat. After a pause, Ebenezer spoke.

‘I have bad news for you,’ he said in a

quiet way that was lovely. 'Urged by considerations which are new to me, I have resolved to leave the country with my daughter here. I start from England tomorrow, never to return. I'm afraid you must give up your project. As for me, I abandon my part in it.

'A sneak !' cried Jaggs, in a fury. 'What else could you expect from a gentleman lag ? I told you long ago, Bill, that they are a shy lot who ain't got no honour.'

Spevins, too, looked savage and disappointed, and eyed me threateningly, as if he'd like to give me something when my head was turned ; and his brow remained sullen as Ebenezer continued :

'Not so ! I have said nothing. Mr. Scarraweg is ignorant of your plans, and will be for some months to come ; and he will not betray you then, if you let the project drop. If you do not, you must abide the consequences.'

I groaned in my inside. Was I to be driven to connive with these blackguards ? Talk of compounding a felony, indeed ! and I a chief-warder of her Majesty's convict

prison ! But it didn't signify ; for whether it was this project or another, they were safe to come back to the fold again. Thank goodness ! those lavender trousers of Jaggs's would soon be confiscated to the state, and he would return to claim a bedroom in the Hotel ! When I looked at those loud lavender trousers and patent-leather shoes, I confess I didn't feel as Christian as I could wish. It was just like the heartless scoundrel, to come flaunting his fine feathers under the noses of the sack-makers around us, who had nothing to cover their nakedness or to fill their empty stomachs !

Well ! I might, perhaps, have to connive at something, but I was not going to connive at the presence of these rascals in the same room with my legatee. So I motioned them to the stairs (they had not come a foot within the doorway), and said, sternly :

‘ Harkee, my men ! you ought to know by this time that I'm not to be trifled with. So be off at once, and don't show your ugly mugs in the neighbourhood till this man has sailed. He is under heavy obligations to me, and from this moment is my son. If you don't

be off without another word I'll insist upon his telling me what your plans are, and denounce you. He was going to tell me the other day in confidence, but I wouldn't listen; for I don't care about playing the spy unless you force me to it. Come! one—two—three——off!'

Jaggs's lantern visage wore a malignant scowl, as he muttered:

'Going away? It's well the sneak should keep his barrow off my track!'

Spevins, on the other hand, recovered his surprise by and bye. His face cleared after a minute, and he shrugged his shoulders.

'Just like my luck!' he said, addressing the company with a doleful laugh. 'The odds were agin me even while fortun' seemed to smile. The odds are agin me now, as they all'ys was, and all'ys will be. But 'tain't my fault. I *am* unfortnit, and no mistake!'

And with that the pair departed.

When their footsteps had ceased to echo, we tried to take up the thread of our discourse again; but Miss Mildred sighed and could not regain her spirits. Whether she

was horrified at the sight of the low fellows who had been her father's chosen comrades, or whether, seeing Jaggs's hang-dog looks, she feared lest he might revenge himself upon him, I know not ; but I do know she counted the minutes which stood between her and the new life, and that the operation being contagious, I followed suit.

There was little more to settle, but being all a little afraid of our thoughts, we discussed each question over and over. We were to write to each other very often ; that was understood. I was to join them as soon as I was able. There is something solemn about looking upon Motherland for the last time, even though she's been no better than a step-mother. We all felt it, and talked in subdued voices as if Death was in the house. Ebenezer was anxious that his wife should some day know the truth.

'She might be softened and become a better woman,' he said, 'if she knew the story of her first husband's trials. She would learn at the same time that though alive she would never see him, and that the child whom she had maltreated had been miracu-

lously thrown by a decree of Heaven in the way of him who was dearest to her on earth. This might save her from remorse some day.'

To that end he would write his history, he declared, and send it to me, sheet by sheet, as it was written, in order that it might be published. People would read it and be sorry for the victim of a moment's madness, and perhaps bestir themselves to achieve something for the help of those prostrate ones who cannot rise without a helping hand. One only would guess the name that was suppressed, and the sad tale might induce her to look inward.

The idea was good, and I encouraged him to carry it out; disgusted as I am at the way in which you, ladies and gents, bid people to reform themselves, and, in practice, prevent their reformation. But we've had all that out before, so there's no use in another tantrum, is there? Well, I've written more since I took up this affair of his, than I ever did in all my life. I hope you'll like the yarn, and turn your serious attention to the condition of the poor prisoners WHEN THEY COME OUT OF PRISON. It'll

take you all your time. *Never mind those who are inside.* Though our armour ain't altogether without holes, we're quite capable of looking after them ; more capable than you, I daresay, for all your palaver ; than you, who are inclined to be indulgent to the extent of an ounce or two of skilly, or an extra yard of flannel. We are quite capable of measuring out the skilly by our own experience. Trust us, that's all.

Well, really I have done at last ; no I haven't, though. Over across the water, Ebenezer's taken to his brushes again. For two pins I'll give him a commission to paint that there picture of the angels rejoicing over the sinner that repenteth. Why, here's the post come in with the usual letter from my legatee ! Bless her dear heart and eyes ! What an affectionate girl, and what a good correspondent ! She says :

'Though the mark of the wound may never disappear, it is healed and cicatrised. Papa is unrecognisable. Even you would not know him, you kind old grump, although you think yourself so artful. Under fresh auspices, in this New Land of Promise,

he has assumed another identity—a third, resembling the first—the same, and yet another. No longer irascible, impulsive, impetuous ; or sullen, vindictive, and morose ; he has sat down with thankfulness to enjoy the glow of Autumn—humbled, chastened, matured, but not unhappy—with a calm content, veiled by a film of sadness.'



L'ENVOI.



HAVE had the honour to present to the public six typical convicts, with a hope that the newly-introduced will have liked each other.

With one exception they are all real individuals, and are at this minute grumbling over their allotted tasks in fustian knickerbockers and gaiters, with cropped pates and bristly chins, within the gloomy walls of one or other of our penal establishments.

For the purposes of fiction, I have of course been compelled to prune here a twig and there a branch, and have grafted on their story events which occurred to other prisoners. But in all save small details, there they are, and may be looked upon any day by those who care to verify the portraits (with the key of their badge-numbers from me), through the medium of an order from the Secretary of State.

As regards officials, it is, for obvious reasons, otherwise. That excellent person Mr. R——, chief-warder at Dartmoor, will not, I am sure, suppose for a mo-

ment that my Mr. Scarraweg is intended for a caricature of him ; neither will the present governor of that prison find his counterpart in my 'dapper-martinet.' As it happens, there was no governor at all there during the time of my residence at Princetown ; one having recently been promoted, while his successor had not yet arrived.

But at the same time, I am not quite prepared to affirm that my prison-officials are entirely fictitious. Mr. Scarraweg does exist, but not at Dartmoor. The members of the service will probably seem to detect here and there a well-known trait ; and should they do so, I feel assured that they will, at the same time, perceive that such traits have been dotted down in the spirit of harmless banter, and that I have taken the greatest possible care to wound the feelings or susceptibilities of none of those gentlemen who were so uniformly courteous to a wanderer ; and whom I have to thank, one and all, for many hours of genial hospitality.

I have tried, by means of parable and exhortation, to point out sundry defects in certain branches of the penal system ; as well as one or two serious blemishes with reference to other matters—notably, with regard to the probably well-meaning, but certainly abortive, action of the Prisoners' Aid Societies, and the outrageous treatment of military prisoners (see vol. ii., pages 318—324). If I can succeed in drawing public attention to these things, my mission will be accomplished, my guerdon earned ; for the public (when its attention has been once aroused) is just, and intolerant

of abuse, and these cobwebs need only the irruption of a ray of daylight to promptly feel the broom.

People profess, in an airy and picturesque manner, to adore Virtue. Here is an opportunity for putting theory into practice.

If some who happen to have toasted their toes over this novel in their cosy nests (be they Catholic or Protestant, or Mahometan, or Jews), chance to recall the dictum which propoundeth the theory that 'the greatest of these is Charity'—why, Father Cooke of the Roman Catholic Mission House, at Tower Hill, will be only too thankful to acknowledge timely help; and he will also be prepared to show—only too abundantly—that my sketch of the Irish sackmakers of his district is in nowise exaggerated or overdrawn. Would that it were!

I take this opportunity of thanking the Press—always with one exception—for their kindly reception of my last book.

LEWIS WINGFIELD.

May, 1880.

THE END.

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